THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CONVERSATION

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by

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TO

KARL BÜHLER

MY FRIEND AND TEACHER

PREFACE

This book, like its predecessors, *Voice and Personality*, *The Psychology of Effective Speaking* and *The Maturing Mind*, is an attempt to discuss psychologically some aspects of social life which interest ordinary people. These features are, however, scarcely mentioned in most books on psychology. The present volume is written in the belief that psychologists ought not to avoid problems of human behaviour because they are popularly interesting, and with the hope that other authors may be encouraged to discuss these subjects at greater length.

Neglect of conversation can be observed in most treatments of the problems of personality and intelligence. Our judgments about other people depend greatly upon the way in which we perceive their facial expressions, gestures, and speech-sounds. Many estimates of intelligence are based upon the examinees' ability to put down the correct symbol after reading a question. Yet every one can distinguish between the stodgy person, slow in the uptake when spoken to, though quick at writing later what he " really " wanted to say, and the man who, catching your speech on the wing, answers it accurately. If we realize that more than once recently the lives of millions have depended upon the outcome of conversations between men who cannot understand each other's language, the importance of the subject becomes clear.

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T. H. PEAR.

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CHAPTER I

QUESTIONS ABOUT CONVERSATION

THE first question which may occur to a logically minded reader is, "How can conversation be defined?" The dictionary gives several different meanings, some archaic, but we may perhaps be satisfied with Webster's description of "converse," "to interchange thoughts and opinions in speech." "Synonyms" for conversation (and this shows how difficult it is to convince oneself that any so-called synonym in English is what it claims to be) are "communion," "familiarity," "conference," "dialogue," "colloquy," "chat."

In this book I propose to use the word "conversation" as implying the fact of speaking together. Animals may be said to converse by signs or sounds; children, behind the teacher's back, by grimaces; the deaf by manual signs; telegraphists by tapping; Central Australians by regulating columns of smoke. Here we shall not consider speechless conversation. It must, however, be made clear that except for telephone conversations, radio conversa-

tions, or overheard conversations between unseen people, the accompanying facial expressions, gestures, and postures will be implicitly included in our concept of conversation.

It is not without interest that an English novelist, Miss Dorothy Richardson,[1] has called attention to the possibility that one way of speaking in our country, that which characterizes men in the ruling classes, may have developed from the desire to maintain either the composure or the dignity of the features, or both. She gives an illustration. Pronounced in the orthodox way, " *Too men-ny eye-erns in the fy-er*" involves "incessant chin-wagging, jaws moving round like grindstones," whereas "toom-ny ahns in 'ta' fah"—a very usual upper-class equivalent—involves just two small snaps. This way of speaking is characteristic of the school prefect, obliged to canalize all his forces in order to remain the composed and authoritative representative of a code. Being a prefect, he will instinctively avoid all sounds that tend to discompose his authoritative and dignified mug. But this habit begins there, and then goes through the services, all over the dominions and colonies, and, for a reason probably quite easy to find, is rampant in the Indian Civil. . . . In the Diplomatic, where graciousness and *bonhomie* are as important as dignified composure, and authority is not specially called for, there is less jargon and more face convulsion.

It is doubtful if all foreigners know this. If they did,

[1] *Pilgrimage*, pages 164–65, here condensed. London. (J. M. Dent and Sons.)

they might find it easier to interpret the Englishman's conversation.

A further source of misunderstanding by foreigners has so far nowhere been noted. A scientist from the Continent, whom I know, was invited to London to expound his views to an English committee. Two of its members were disinclined to accept his ideas without question. The meeting was not a success. The visitor found their English almost incomprehensible, since each of their enigmatic countenances was a mere bracket for a pipe, effectively hindering any sound waves which might otherwise have produced occasionally comprehensible patterns in the ear of the foreigner. And he was too polite to point this out.

The simplest form of conversation with which we may find it convenient to deal here is that in which words are used chiefly, or even simply, to express or intensify friendly relations between people. The words employed need not mean literally what they say, but may merely constitute a friendly way of behaving. Travellers in trains need no illustrative examples. Such vague preliminary exchange of talk plays a considerable part in primitive relationship.

"Throughout the Western world," remark C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards in *The Meaning of Meaning*, " it is agreed that people must meet frequently, and that it is not only agreeable to talk, but that it is a matter of common courtesy to say something even when there is hardly anything to say." "Every civilized man," says the late Professor J. P. Mahaffy, in his *Principles of the Art*

of Conversation, "feels, or ought to feel, this duty ; it is the universal accomplishment which all must practise ; those who fail are punished by the dislike or neglect of society."

In a special chapter of *The Meaning of Meaning* Professor B. Malinowski describes in detail the exchange of words which he calls *phatic communion* : language used in free, aimless social intercourse. When a number of people sit together at a village fire after all the daily tasks are over, or when they chat resting from work, or when they accompany some mere manual work by gossip quite unconnected with what they are doing, the words they use do not depend upon what happens at that moment ; the meaning of any utterance cannot be connected with the purpose of what the speaker or hearer is doing. Inquiries about health, comments on weather, affirmatives upon some supremely obvious state of things—all such are exchanged not to inform, nor to express action.

Professor Malinowski thinks that in discussing the function of speech in mere sociabilities we come to one of the bedrock aspects of man's nature in society—the tendency to congregate and enjoy one another's company. Speech is the intimate correlate of the tendency, for to a natural man another man's silence is not a reassuring factor, but something alarming and dangerous. The stranger who cannot speak the language is to all savage tribesmen a " natural enemy." Even in our own country, the new-comer who speaks another dialect of the same language is not always regarded with approval. " The breaking of silence, the communion of

words is the first act to establish links of friendship, which is consummated only by the breaking of bread and the communion of food." After the first formula there comes a flow of language—purposeless expressions of preference or aversion, accounts of irrelevant happenings, comments on what is perfectly obvious. Such gossip, as found in primitive societies, differs only a little from our own. Always the same emphasis of affirmation and consent, mixed perhaps with an incidental disagreement which creates the bonds of antipathy. Or personal accounts of the speaker's views and life history, to which the hearer listens under some restraint and with slightly veiled impatience, waiting till his own turn arrives to speak. For in this use of speech the bonds created between hearer and speaker are not quite symmetrical, the man linguistically active receiving the greater share of social pleasure and self-enhancement. But though the hearing given to such utterances is as a rule not as intense as the speaker's own share, it is quite essential for his pleasure, and the reciprocity is established by the change of rôles.

I have tried several times (and have failed) to describe in a simple manner the psychological and physiological problems concerned with the anticipation of conversation. They are obviously important. The introvert may derive much pleasure from knowing that he is excused from conversing with a certain person, and may write charming letters instead with no exertion. The extravert, in contrast, may desire conversation so intensely that even the thought of it is disturbing, and he relieves the tension by seeking conversation with the particular

person. Indeed, such a behaviour-difference is characteristic of one type of extravert and introvert. Behaviourists and *Gestalt* psychologists could perhaps describe these problems in their own language, but it seems doubtful if at the moment they could do more.

There is a common and interesting experience which consists in desiring conversation and then, when the chance comes, not taking it, with subsequent regret. I refer to shyness.

Considering the frequency with which shyness is encountered in England, it is curious that so few of our own psychologists have discussed it. Perhaps they share the common belief that shyness is to be expected in normal, decent people. That view is not held in all English-speaking countries. In the U.S.A. an investigation into teachers' attitudes towards children's mis-behaviour revealed that while, perhaps not unnaturally, teachers regarded the extraverted, aggressive conduct of children as undesirable, and neglected problems offered by the introverted child, the doctors in the child guidance clinics, who did not have to teach the children, looked upon shyness as a serious defect and aggressiveness as normal in a child growing up in a pioneer country.

Yet, at least in England, we are more than merely tolerant of shyness. " We tend to accept it," says Dr. F. A. Hampton, "as something inborn, as a characteristic part of the charm of youth, and as evidence, when it persists into later years, of a certain fineness of character ; it seems even to be a trait, not wholly to be deplored, in the national temperament."

It is, however, difficult to attach any unitary meaning to the term Shyness. The word seems to stand for many transitions between an extensive turning away from reality, called *schizophrenia*, and the common technique of avoiding unattractive people and duties.

In one of its forms the conversation of the shy person can even be attractive, while in another it is maddening, and in a third it is amusing.

It is well known that the artificial personality which the shy man may create as a façade to his real self may become habitual, and so lead to posing, which, however, is not penetrated by every one. Or he may approach his difficult social situations from behind a screen of uneasy loquacity or facetiousness ; a fact to be remembered when judging a person as a conversationalist.

Dr. Hampton maintains—at first sight, perhaps, paradoxically—that the stammerer is seldom shy. He is often successfully assertive in his stammering. Perhaps shyness and stammering are alternative modes of reaction to the same situation. Beyond the observation that most shyness expresses a conflict between the tendencies towards self-assertion and self-abasement—a fact which, I think, has been long suspected by stage impersonators of children—little has been contributed towards a theory of shyness. I should like to add a suggestion : lack of desire or of ability to express one's thoughts in words, at that particular moment, may be behind two common forms of shyness—the person's use of stereotyped smiles and friendly expressions when all the time he is wishing to be somewhere else, and inscrutable sulkiness (as it

appears to those who cannot get behind it). Perhaps a person who knows the appropriate phrases to use in a certain situation, and how to speak them with suitable gestures and expression, is seldom or never shy. A shy person in a restaurant where he lunches daily may easily find the right phrases to use to the waiter, and, indeed, may unconsciously stick to the restaurant for such a reason. Faced with another restaurant, menu, and waiter, he may be shy. Many people, too, find it difficult or impossible to voice a perfectly justified complaint if they cannot use stereotyped phrases. A man who might be shy in a restaurant may find it easy to complain in a committee composed of his business colleagues. A friend from the Continent, who lived in a northern English city for two years, noticed with interest that in a restaurant he never heard any one adversely criticize his food. And these people are proud of their straight, even blunt speech. Have they never anything to complain about, are they uncritical, or are they shy in public places?

People who, belonging to a culture-level lower than that of the person whom they are addressing, are ashamed of being ungrammatical or of using a socially disapproved dialect, and people who do not know the right expression to use to older persons or to the opposite sex are usually shy. In England, members of the wealthier classes, educated at preparatory and public schools, can often, in later life, express disapproval without enmity, acerbity, or aggressiveness, and for that reason the reproved ones may take it without resentment. "Ticking off" some one who deserves it is a technique

which can be learned. This fact is appreciated if one tries to " tick off " somebody in a language of which one is uncertain, or in an English-speaking country with less social stratification than ours. While considering social stratification, it might be remembered that some shyness in England may be due to the shy one fearing that his speech sounds will not be acceptable to the circle in which he is at the moment. In more democratic countries, at least, this type of shyness is much less marked than in our own.

The situation in which two people prepare to converse with each other is commonly observed, yet it is not easy to describe. Apart from psychologists' references to a tension arising between the persons, a tension relieved or lessened by speech, I have found few psychological descriptions.

Usually non-verbal signals come first ; rarely does one address a conversation to a stranger who is looking the other way. The opener is encouraged by expressions of welcome in the other's face, and the extent to which these differ in different facial types and nationalities is itself an interesting matter. How, for instance, in a non-smiling community, would an Englishman feel that his proffered remarks were well received ?

Then follow, perhaps, non-verbal auditory signals, *e.g.* the tentative cough, the "er . . . er . . ." ; and then the verbal ones, " Would you . . . ? " or the formal " I wonder if I might ? " I think that the very formal " I beg your pardon " when used as an excuse for breaking in on a conversation, and, perhaps, the " pardon me "

which one hears from Americans are, in England, signs of social stratification, while in America this significance may be less. Perhaps the very use of " pardon " implies that the speaker recognizes himself to be, at least temporarily, in a position inferior to that of the person whom he interrupts. If he belongs to a social class which considers itself to be never inferior, even temporarily, to anybody else, this method of interruption would not be thought of (*i.e.* would be taboo), while in the class just below this it would be avoided.

" It does not come naturally to man," says Esmé Wingfield-Stratford in *Good Talk*, " to make an art of what he does by necessity. His three primal habits are those of breathing, eating, talking. If he omits the first, he suffocates in a matter of minutes ; if the second, he starves in a matter of days ; if the third, in a matter, perhaps of years, he goes off his head. So he does all three, as he continues to live, without asking why or how."

This may go some way towards explaining the amazing fact that social psychologists may write thousands of thousands of words about man's behaviour without taking conversation seriously, and that even psychologists who include in their books some mention of language show little sensitiveness to the fact that man seldom talks to himself if he can get any one to listen to him.

Certain classes of social psychologists are dependent upon conversation as a means of getting their material, and recently some of them have examined their technique. Dr. Ethel J. Lindgren and Mr. Gregory

Bateson, when describing field-work in social psychology in Eastern Asia and New Guinea respectively, emphasize the advantages of being a good converser. Mr. Bateson urges that recorders of social behaviour should give details concerning the mental type of the investigator and of the culture which he is examining. One culture may be characterized by sudden and irregular changes from emotional anæsthesia to emotional hyperæsthesia. Another may tend to periodic variation between gaiety and sadness. People belonging to this culture-pattern may regard the former kind of behaviour as " cold " and " stand-offish."

> " In New Guinea," says Mr. Bateson, " the investigator is welcomed by the natives because he brings trade, goods, and he has a definite prestige. He has to decide whether to exploit that prestige to the utmost—and be addressed by the natives in the same tone which they reserve for Europeans—or to discard that prestige and converse with the natives upon their own terms—and be despised by the returned labourers, who feel that a European ought to behave as a ' master.' He will get a very different impression of the general tone of the culture and of the norms of native personality according to his method of approach. If he comes as a master he will find the natives obedient, jolly and garrulous, although in reality among themselves they may be contra-suggestible and suspicious. In all publications the type to which the investigator belongs should be stated and the general tone of his behaviour described."

Dr. Lindgren, after work among Mongol and Tungus tribes, urging that the temperamental characteristics of the ethnological observer should always be considered, says :

> " The observer of social psychological phenomena needs to

adapt himself as completely as possible to his human surroundings, and his own physical and mental characteristics will therefore largely determine his degree of success. In choosing a region and a people for study, he should carefully consider his physique in relation to the climate, altitude and food supplies of the region, and his habits and temperament in relation to the mode of life and conventions of the group. The European who feels at ease in the scattered tents of nomads on the steppe, or in virgin forests, is usually of a different type from the one who can live happily in the crowded dwellings of a sedentary community. A garrulous investigator arouses suspicion in a taciturn group and is in turn disconcerted by the long silences, while a shy and inarticulate observer is at an equal disadvantage in an inquisitive *milieu*, where every one demands to know his name, age, origin, purpose, destination, salary, and the exact number of his wives and children. To the social psychologist, the temperamental pre-requisites for working harmoniously in the group are even more valuable than a fluent knowledge of the language.

" Particularly in Eastern Asia, where the white man usually lacks prestige and official support, it is important that the investigator should know how to interest and *amuse* the people he is studying, and be ready to give as much curious information as he receives. Pictures, especially of shamans (priests), are always popular, but the Mongols and Tungus, like ourselves, enjoy nothing better than a good story about a successful thief, preferably a horse thief."

In a subsequent paper she writes :

" I find that most of the ethnologists and social psychologists whom I know—not excluding myself—believe that they are super-types, chameleons that can always change to the suitable ' tone ' for the person or *milieu* to be studied. Unfortunately this is seldom, if ever, the case. We cannot afford to neglect popular generalizations, which seem to have much truth in them, such as that the French get on uncommonly well with the Chinese, while the Irish are admired in Mexico.

" The two primitive peoples most familiar to me, the Mongols and Tungus, although living in close contact with each other and often under very similar external conditions, exhibit striking differences in behaviour, *e.g.* in the amount and rate of conversation. When Mongols enter a tent they often say just two words, then squat there silently, perhaps for several hours, finally leaving abruptly without uttering another syllable. This is apt to be a great strain on a naturally talkative person.

" The Tungus on the other hand are much more talkative, and love excitement."

and

" But it is not safe to rely on the inspiration of the moment in adjusting oneself to groups which may or may not prove to be congenial in type. The field worker who wishes to get the maximum of social psychological material must be prepared to amuse and interest the people he is studying. In some parts of the world it is probably not as essential as in the Far East, where the safety of travellers is often roughly proportionate to their popularity.

" It would be extremely unwise to tell proud Asiatics that our *ancestors* lived as they do now, for they would at once sense an implied inferiority ; but one can gossip about many things that Europeans still do to-day, such as hunting and fishing, cattle-breeding, tanning, cooking, etc.

" Variations on the above theme proved a useful mode of introducing myself and my investigations to every group I encountered, when I was asked why I had come ; I also said that I enjoyed their mode of life and liked following it for a time."

and

" But the social psychologist will do well to follow the essential lines of the natives' mode of life. When living among the nomads of Mongolia and Manchuria, for instance, it is a serious mistake to have camp-beds, chairs, or tables, and especi-

ally to have a separate tent, with any pretence of privacy, for the European members of the party. The Mongols and Tungus understand only the sort of tent in which you do everything ; sleep, eat, work, and entertain. They must be free to enter at any time, share the tea or meal, sit down on the bedding or whatever is lying about and spit on the ground left bare in the centre of the tent. If they cannot do this, it entirely upsets their conversation. Needless to say, the traveller should have, as his mainstay, food that is acceptable to the natives, so that they can share it with pleasure. . . .

"Even more important than photographs and strange objects are good stories, since they establish a festive atmosphere and, of course, elicit more stories. Anecdotes taken from or concerning a neighbouring tribe, with familiar customs, will naturally be more successful (as among ourselves). . . ."

Anatomists can describe the events in the speech organs and adjacent parts of the body which produce the sound waves interpreted by the hearer. Any one, however, who listens to a broadcast talk by an intimate friend may find (a) that the talk seems partly depersonalized— it is like, and yet not like, the speaker—or (b) that the customary visual accompaniments of the speech are imagined, or (c) that there is little difference between the talk as broadcast and as it would have been if given "straight." But the æsthetic unsatisfactoriness of a telephone conversation suggests that most of us, when face to face, watch the speaker, and freely interpret changes of facial expression and coloration, of posture and gesture. Conversation with a vivacious person is usually more fun than with a stodgy-faced one, though the latter may be more interesting. It seems doubtful if this can be explained except in terms of primitive sym-

pathy, or of unconscious tendencies to mimicry. This capacity makes people differ greatly from each other ; not all of us easily rejoice with them that do rejoice and weep with those that weep. Yet since many of·us when speaking in our own language with people whom we like, are apt to understand them in this mimetic manner, does this not cast still further doubt (if that be needed) upon the average person's ability completely to understand some one speaking a language foreign to the hearer ?

So far we have considered only the relevant physiological events in persons speaking to us, and in ourselves when listening and preparing to answer. Yet certain other bodily occurrences, important though undescribed, may be very disturbing. The prospect of conversation—merely imagining it—may cause excitement, pleasure or "unpleasure," fear, or annoyance ; and most of these, as in lovers, may be coloured with an erotic tinge. Disappointment at the non-occurrence of the expected conversation is equally important—and undescribed.

The bodily result of a conversation may be satisfaction or disappointment. Either experience may be combined with a curious, perhaps a special form of fatigue. Some people are easily fatigued by conversation ; may it be because they sympathize more intensely with the speaker ? This may be either a primitive sympathy with little moral value, or sympathy of the highest and most practical kind. Some psychotherapists find conversations with their patients extremely fatiguing, because of the emotional strain involved in sympathizing

with, or at least reacting towards, the other's recital of his doubts, fears, likes, dislikes, and hopes. Other mental healers work with the minimum expenditure of emotion. This indeed may characterize the different techniques of the suggestionist, persuasionist, and psychoanalyst. Some people may be easily tired by conversation just because they have no sympathy with the converser, and no interest, and are tired by the fuss and noise of the others' voices.

The difference in the strain which conversation imposes may depend in part upon the use of different types of imagery or vehicles of thinking. Though I should scarcely describe myself as an unready speaker, or as unduly shy, I find from sad experience that even a brief conversation in a smoking-room with a group of friendly but miscellaneous and unselected people may be so fatiguing that return to work after it requires a considerable effort. Lecturing immediately after such a conversation is very difficult. I doubt, however, if some of my colleagues feel the same strain. It seems partly attributable to sympathy with the speakers, and to the difficulty in expressing one's own meaning adequately, which may be greater than in ordinary lecturing. Naturally the tension is greater when the talk is controversial, but even at other times there is strain. When I hold my tongue and behave towards such a conversation as if it were a stage play, there is almost no tense feeling.

A scarcely honest method of avoiding strain in conversation is to employ colourless polite phrases which suggest that you know almost nothing about the subject,

but would find it interesting if you did, when actually you are very nearly an expert on it. This technique is occasionally used by academic people at dinner parties.

Strain in conversing with a mixed group may be caused by trying to support your point of view before some one whose critical powers you fear, dislike, or resent, but whom you are not permitted to oppose with the conventional debating society technique. It may be the physiological cost of describing a subject about which you are enthusiastic to some one who is not. This puts you, unfairly, into an inferior position when you " ought " to feel superior. The hostess who asks a psychologist, " Don't you think there's something in those intelligence tests ? " does this.

Talking this paragraph over with some friends, I mentioned some one we knew who appears to keep cool in all conversations, even about high-explosive matters. They asked, " But doesn't he take care to direct such conversations ? "

Most people who meet a variety of acquaintances will know that they consciously seek conversation with some people, deliberately avoid it with others, and, perhaps unconsciously, avoid it with members of a third class for whom they feel no overt distaste. Writing introspectively, I should say that after conversing with another person for more than about five minutes one may develop either of two types of attitude. In the first, the give-and-take of conversation has seemed quite effortless. After it one remains cool, collected, and discriminative, with no feeling of depleted energy. Examples of this

are : a casual chat in a train, or a short interview during routine administration. Conversation with another kind of person leaves one exhilarated, excited, fatigued, or depressed, and occasionally with a changed concept of oneself. Perhaps certain conversers, *e.g.* the hard-boiled administrator, the " director " type of psychotherapist, the cultured introvert with his stereotyped smiles and gestures, can carry on many long conversations with no strain, except a slightly sore throat, while the extravert, with his sympathetic intuition of the other's point of view, and perhaps with a primitive tendency to imitate, may " get all stirred up inside." He may, so to speak, give much and get little, while possibly the other gives little and absorbs much. It is, of course, well known that a person may care too much for people in general to handle them without a good deal of strain, unnecessary from the administrator's point of view.

THE ART OF CONVERSATION

I have made several attempts to write this chapter. To some the task might seem fairly easy ; one has to read the famous writings on this theme, let one's learning settle down, record the names of people with whom one would most and least like to converse ; put opposite these names a few reasons, recollect and analyse one's most and least satisfactory conversations during, say, the last year ; and finally the subject would streamline itself, glide into this book, and halt at the head of the list of chapters.

It hasn't worked out like that. After one has read a few classical works on this subject, the question arises : How can the ancient symposia be mentioned in the same breath as a modern public dinner with speeches, or a bridge-party with the radio as background ? To read Bacon, Addison, Johnson, Franklin, Chesterfield, Hazlitt, Stevenson, Mahaffy (this convenient list is borrowed from Mr. Milton Wright's *The Art of Conversation*) would be to court mental surfeit. Mr. Wright comments appropriately that though, probably, there is not a single sound principle in the art of conversation that one or more of

these great writers has not acclaimed, their productions are chiefly essays in praise of good conversation. Moreover, tastes differ with the period, and even Dr. Mahaffy's book discusses polite social conversation as it was carried on fifty years ago and in Northern Ireland.

Abandoning any idea of presenting a conspectus of well-known views of conversation, I have tried to steer a way through some prejudices, fashions, and fads in conversation to-day, and to make statements which are supported by evidence, yet not, I hope, utterly banal.

An obvious way of beginning would be to describe the part conversation plays in modern life. I tried to do this in No. 1 of the present Series, *The Maturing Mind*; especially in Chapters VII., VIII., and IX.; " The Conversation and its Delights," " Differing with Others," and " Why not Learn to Discuss ? " The substance of these chapters will not be repeated, but they will be supplemented here.

There is, of course, no doubt concerning the importance of conversation to-day. Increased ease of travel, the tendency of people to rush about (is not the epitaph of a famous automobile manufacturer, "Here lies a man who made every one want to be somewhere else " ?), the increased use of the telephone and the corresponding decrease in letter-writing ; all these facts scarcely need to be mentioned. Yet a writer who tries to lay down rules for an art of conversation ought to take account of great differences of taste shown by various types of converser. Some subjects popularly chosen for conversation will be discussed on pages 112–121.

The suitable length of each contribution to a conversation offers an interesting problem. Does the wise-cracking exchange of well-worn slang phrases characterize more than a few members of society ? In any conversation about important matters, knowledge of which is possessed by only one of the conversers, snappy interruptions are often resented. Perhaps " short-paragraph " conversations are suitable for mere chats rather than for talks which aim at clearing up or adding to knowledge.

When one attempts to define an art of conversation, prejudices concerning different kinds of conversation must be recorded. To do this, however, is not a waste of time, for it may throw light upon the social group, the attitude towards life, and the culture-level of the one who expresses them. Beyond all doubt, a person's conversation can be a valuable sign of his culture-pattern.

Different districts in England seem to be characterized by different types of conversation. And though to quote an imaginary instance is not without its risks, Lancashire folk will trust Mr. T. Thompson to present, in *Lancashire Fun*, the kind of talk heard in many towns of his county. Here is the beginning of one called :

An Evening Drive

" It's a grand neet," said Jim Metcalf, as Alice came out of the shop. " It's a waste o' time messin' about like this."

" Tha would think it a waste o' time if there wor nought to eat in th' house," said Alice indignantly. " Ah have to do mi buyin' in."

" Ah know," said Jim, " but Ah mak nowt o' stonnin' on th' flags like a stuck pig while tha'rt in th' shop."

"Tha could come in wi' me," said Alice.

"That'd be worse," said Jim.

"Well," said Alice, "what dosta want ? "

"Sithee, lass," said Jim, "there's a charrybang yon. Hawf-crown evenin' drive. What about seein' a bit o' th' country for a change ? "

"It's o' reet if tha'rt a millionaire," said Alice, "but it's no use thee comin' to me for aught. Ah've spent up."

"Tha allus has," said Jim with a grin. "But Ah wom't gooin' to ax thee for a penny. Ah wor gooin' to trate thee."

"It's a bit sin' tha did," said Alice.

"There's not mich margin, lass, wi' my spendin' money," said Jim. "But Ah've saved a bit o' o'ertime brass."

"Ah could do wi' some new curtins," said Alice.

"There's one good thing about this life," said Jim philo-sophically. "What we cannot get we con allus do bowt."

"It's no good talkin' to thee," said Alice, "tha's never owt to seek."

"Well," said Jim, "let's get in. It's fillin' up."

"Wheer's it gooin' to ? " asked Alice.

"How do Ah know ?" answered Jim. "As long as it's gooin' what does it matter ? "

"When Ah'm gooin' onywheer," said Alice, "Ah want to know wheer Ah'm gooin'."

"That's just difference between a chap an' a woman," said Jim. "A chap doesn't care wheer he's gooin' as long as he is gooin'."

"Well," said Alice. "Ah want to know afore Ah get in."

"O' reet," said Jim. "Wheer arta gooin', gaffer ? "

"It's a surprise drive," said the driver.

"Theer tha art," said Jim. "It's a surprise."

"Ah've had o' th' surprises Ah want i' my life," said Alice. "He might be gooin' anywheer."

"If it's o' th' same to thee," said Jim to the driver, "Ah'd be obliged if tha'd stretch a point. Wilta whisper in her ear ? "

"Last time Ah whispered in a woman's ear," said the driver, "Ah geet a rare clout."

"Ah nobbut want to know wheer tha'rt gooin'," said Alice.

"Oh, Ah con do that," said the driver; "Ah wondered what tha wor after."

"Ah'll trust thee," said Jim.

How far should a good converser keep himself out of the talk, except implicitly? To this question there is no simple answer. Dr. Johnson defined the essentials of conversation as knowledge, material, imagination, presence of mind, and a resolution not to be overcome by failures. Did he, perhaps, mean "not to be snubbed"? It would have been interesting to hear the opinions about Dr. Johnson held by those with whom he believed he had succeeded as a converser. They may have included a few introverts who agreed with the great man because it was too much trouble to contradict him.

Some people think that the converser ought to keep all mention of himself in the background; yet an egotistical friend of mine (his name is well known to the reading and listening public) is splendid company. I should never dream of counting the "I's" in his conversation, and suspect that they dot it like daisies on a neglected lawn. But need all lawns be free from daisies? Another man, popular in smoking-rooms, comments richly upon life with a twinkling, but illusory, impersonality. His remarks flatter you by assuming that you have had a good education, since they contain frequent literary references. When these are explicit, they are often misquoted wittily. They sound like

melodies from Gluck orchestrated by Noel Coward. He would be disappointed if his conversation seemed impersonal.

Lord Chesterfield advised his nephew to talk often but never long ; to tell stories very seldom and only when they are apt and very short, and, in mixed company, to avoid argumentative polemical conversation. His analysis of personal vanity leads Lord Chesterfield to counsel his nephew never to speak of himself, to take care not to drop one single word that could be construed directly or indirectly as fishing for applause.

It may, however, be asked whether this deliberate deletion of references to personality might not lead to the exchange of flavourless, filleted thoughts in the kind of English conversation which exasperates so many Americans. One, at least, has been moved to express opinions about this aspect of social life. We find them in the vivacious book *With Malice Towards Some* by Margaret Halsey, the wife of a young Ph.D. who came to England as an exchange professor. While her husband taught, she saw life as it was being lived in a West Country village. Describing dinner-table conversation, she refers to its boneless quality which :

> " So far as I have heard it, is all form and no content. Listening to Britons dining out is like watching people play first-class tennis with imaginary balls. No awkward pauses, no sense of strain, mar the gentle continuity of the talk. It goes on and on, effortlessly spinning words and words and yet more words out of the flimsiest material : gardening ; English scenery ; innocuous news items ; yesterday's, to-day's and to-morrow's weather.

" By the time this evening was over, I felt, intellectually, like a baby that is cutting its teeth and has nothing to bite on, but there are two things I like about this verbal thistledown. It is so skilful and practised, and also so remote and impersonal, that even I manage to hold my own in it—though ordinarily I am stiff-tongued to a degree which makes other guests think I must be one of the host's feeble-minded relatives and tactfully refrain from asking questions about me. Then, too, there is an aura of repose about this sort of conversation. These people do not talk, as so many Americans do, to make a good impression on themselves by making a good impression on somebody else. They have already made a good impression on themselves and talk simply because they think sound is more manageable than silence."

Should a listener be impersonal ? It seems to have its defects, as Miss Halsey shows when she describes a clergyman, who, when addressing you, has the habit of selecting the longest word in his sentence and repeating it :

" He takes leave in sunset blaze of kindliness and avuncular jollity, which makes me feel consummate hypocrite, for have done nothing to earn Parse's esteem beyond sitting still and letting him talk. Realize sadly that polite passivity commits one to good deal of hypocrisy, as other people see in you only what they want to see, unless definitely notified to contrary."

In short, the English (of that culture-pattern) seldom discuss serious things, and if driven to do so by very adverse circumstances mention such matters in a characteristically unserious way. Yet if one were to begin a dinner-party conversation by differing hotly on a serious matter with another guest or one's host, the social

atmosphere might be ruined. How do Miss Halsey's American friends circumvent this difficulty ?

Some people agree with you in a way which makes it clear that disagreement exists, but that this isn't the place or time for its airing. Whether, on being addressed in this way, you feel snubbed or merely informed will depend not only upon the manner of this intimation, but also upon your intellectual and emotional attitude towards the speaker, causing you to regard his views as potentially disturbing or negligible.

A tangled but interesting problem is offered by opinions sometimes expressed about the person who reports conversation in such a way as to suggest that he came well out of it. "He said . . . but *I* said." This is regarded by some as a sign of lack of culture. May not this view, however, confuse the mere introvert with the cultured person ? One type of introvert might escape such a *faux pas* because of his introversion ; not because of his higher degree of culture. Such a view overlooks the possibility that an extraverted person may be extremely cultured, and express it with an egotism sometimes associated with the doing of big things in a big way.

Subtle but important objections to certain types of conversation take the form of taboos. They differ from other antipathies in that they cause their owner, or victim, to avoid mentioning certain topics, not consciously but unconsciously. If asked about them, he may answer that they seldom or never come into his mind. As Mr. Archibald Lyall points out, sex and

lavatory taboos, treated with a sure hand by Mr. Robert Graves in *Lars Porsena, or The Future of Swearing*, form only a branch of the extensive English system of taboos.

In modern society there are shifting bans upon words relating to reproductory and excretory functions. It is only recently that some newspapers have abandoned the phrase " an interesting event," and many people still use circumlocutions about pregnancy ; yet a member of a royal family recently broadcast the news that she was expecting to give birth to a child. This matter is not simple, for the recent influx, through the films and radio, of words from America may have unexpected results.

In his interesting book *It Isn't Done*, Mr. Lyall defines a taboo as an unwritten and more or less arbitrary regulation which governs the conduct of daily life, and for the breach of which the penalty is unwritten, undefined, but almost always social in character. Though taboo shades off on one side into superstition and on the other into good manners, it must be carefully distinguished from both. Defiance of the taboo involves a social penalty ; defiance of the superstition, such as spilling salt or walking under ladders, is supposed to involve a supernatural one. The superstition, therefore, is never universally observed or reverenced. It is often laughed at. So are taboos, but to a much more limited extent. People who are genuinely indifferent to taboos are almost non-existent, yet many highly conventional people are genuinely indifferent to superstition. A breach of good manners, like the breach of a taboo, involves the diminution of one's social prestige ; but good

manners nearly always have a basis of rational altruism, while taboos are essentially arbitrary in their nature. The best examples of the pure taboo are the public schoolboy's unwritten laws.

In this vein Mr. Lyall writes more penetratingly than any professed social psychologist. He also notices the taboo-upon-mentioning-taboo, so powerful in our civilization.

Taboos in conversation are apt to concern the unequal distribution of wealth, ways of clothing and of speaking, manners, and many physiological functions. The "old-fashioned" taboos governing conversation with any but a man's intimates were health, money, and one's family. The war loosened many of these prohibitions, yet some of these releases are only partial. Immediately after 1918 the "New Poor," using this title about themselves, were often reticent about their actual income, preferring to convey the general impression that it was practically non-existent.

Psychoanalysis has given educated people a terminology with which to speak about sex, and reasons, excuses, or pretexts for doing so. Probably the more frequent co-operation of the sexes in sports has helped to lift the taboo on mentioning the lavatory, though the retention of the name as a euphemism is amusing. Alcohol usually lubricates conversation ; this point needs no labouring.

Taboos in the conversations of army and navy messes have parallels in other professions ; *e.g.* the taboo upon talking "shop" in certain university common-rooms. It is, however, by no means universal. A friend, himself

a member of several universities, has described one in which you are allowed to ask an expert about his own "shop" and expect and get a serious, interesting answer.

Both fashion-changes and marks of social stratification appear in the manner of conversations, as well as in the choice of the words used in them, though in the absence of exact verbal reports there is at present little for the scientific investigator to work upon. The matter is sociologically important, as any one will find if he passes from one region or one social layer of England to another. Conversation in some parts of Lancashire, where I have lived for twenty-five years, still sounds to me like bickering, especially when carried on, as it usually is, by people with perfectly serious faces. Perhaps to these exponents of hard-hitting raillery ordinary talk may sound flat and softly acquiescent.

Nowadays fashions in conversation may be set by film and radio in a way which has never been studied. It seems doubtful if fashionable changes in stage conversation affect many people, but a comparison of the plays of Wilde, Shaw, Coward, and Priestley would be interesting. Here, for example, is a conversation about love.

Oscar Wilde, " *The Importance of Being Earnest* "

Jack (astounded). Well . . . surely. You know that I love you, and you led me to believe, Miss Fairfax, that you were not absolutely indifferent to me.

Gwendolen. I adore you. But you haven't proposed to me yet. Nothing has been said at all about marriage. The subject has not even been touched on.

Jack. Well . . . may I propose to you now ?

Gwendolen. I think it would be an admirable opportunity. And to spare you any possible disappointment, Mr. Worthing, I think it only fair to tell you quite frankly beforehand that I am fully determined to accept you.

Jack. Gwendolen !

Gwendolen. Yes, Mr. Worthing, what have you got to say to me ?

Jack. You know what I have got to say to you.

Gwendolen. Yes, but you don't say it.

Jack. Gwendolen, will you marry me ? (*Goes on his knees.*)

Gwendolen. Of course I will, darling. How long you have been about it. I am afraid you have had very little experience in how to propose.

Jack. My own one, I have never loved any one in the world but you.

Gwendolen. Yes, but men often propose for practice. I know my brother Gerald does. All my girl friends tell me so. What wonderfully blue eyes you have, Ernest. They are quite, quite blue. I hope you will always look at me just like that, especially when there are other people present.

The reader may find it interesting to compare the above with the conversation between Otto and Gilda, in Noel Coward's *Design for Living.*

One who hears, but does not take part in, a conversation may get an impression of it very different from that which the conversers themselves have formed. A desultory conversation, heard passively, is not always as meandering as it seems. One speaker proffers an idea ; the other receives it, apparently drops it again with an idle comment, and replies with a different idea. Such a conversation may seem to get nowhere, yet only the conversers can be certain of this. They may be friends,

or enemies, who understand each other perfectly. Apparently forced warmth in a conversation—" Yes, I'd love to see that film, visit that town, meet that man " —or the languid use of a far from languid adjective, like " marvellous," may simply denote empty-headed laziness, though occasionally it may be a way of saying not too unkindly, " Yes, this subject is interesting and important, but you don't happen to be the sort of person with whom I want to discuss it." The abstracted look with which a pseudo-enthusiasm is expressed may be a snub gentler than a smothered yawn, but not much. The adequate interpretation of such behaviour requires a keen ear for speech-melody as well as a fairly intimate acquaintance with the speaker.

Another interesting problem is offered by fashions in the stylized conversation characterizing different social strata. These phrases, which seem to float in the air, are picked up by most people as they go about their daily work. Only a few recluses and scholars sensitive to the beauty of their language seem to escape them. In all probability the radio and film are powerful influences in this direction. Repartee heard in the streets may have been picked up from gangster films ; an interesting fact when we remember that in the early days of broad-casting some feared that English announcers' accents would refine our language intolerably.

Even kind people occasionally admit that So-and-so is a bore. What constitutes a conversational bore ? A brilliant exponent of economics might bore a specialist dog-breeder, and vice versa. Lecturers who try to reform

their methods are occasionally disappointed by discovering that some students who are bored by the lectures are themselves too dull even to phrase their objections interestingly. Usually, perhaps, we apply the term " bore " to some one who in our estimation ought to be, and isn't, interesting.

A bore does not necessarily annoy us actively ; if he did, he might be interesting. We may wish occasionally to continue an annoying conversation, but never, unless we are studying it psychologically, a boring one. The bore wearies us : sometimes even the thought of him will do this.

Active and passive bores have been distinguished. The former bores his way into you. He often arouses in you unpleasant mental conflicts, with some unconscious factors. One of his most effective methods is to ask questions, often personal ones, which you cannot answer satisfactorily even to yourself. Occasionally you are annoyed because the bore discloses your mental laziness. Anger may arise too, not only at being cross-examined, but at having one's personal weaknesses discovered by a bore. An effective way of dealing with him is to decline to answer ; but to have to do this is also annoying.

The active bore corkscrews his way through the integument which protects you from the outside world. The passive bore often seems to ignore you, and to go on talking, very dully from your point of view, about matters which centre round himself. The definition of a bore as a person who will talk about himself when you want to talk about yourself doesn't always fit this

type, for seldom would you wish to talk about yourself to him. Often, however, he talks about things in which you used to be interested. If he regards the objects of your faded enthusiasm as now centring round himself, this may affront your own sentiment of self-regard, making you sad at remembering the snows of yester-year. Perhaps, too, the passive bore becomes an active one when he chooses his own theme, place, and time to bore you, implying that if he had anything better to do he would scarcely be talking to you.

Are we, in England, yet used enough to the telephone to employ it efficiently and graciously ? On the whole, I think not. In some households, the sound of the tele-phone bell merely releases an argument along lines like these :

" Brrr-Brrr, Brrr-Brrr, Brrr-Brrr."

" Who's going to answer it this time ? " " Oh, *do* go ; it's always for you." " No, *you* ! "

Answered in this defensive attitude, a telephone call which was meant to be friendly may not begin well. Matters are scarcely improved if the Distant Subscriber, as he is respectfully, even distantly, described in the Tele-phone Directory, ignoring the Postmaster-General's court-eous, helpful instruction, omits to announce his identity.

Why does he do this ? Through ignorance, laziness, shyness, or a desire to remain anonymous to other " parties " or " persons " in the " establishment " ? (For this is what you and your house are officially called.)

Do private persons in other countries, where the tele-phone is taken for granted a little more, give way to these

acts of unconscious sabotage? Or, in England, outside business hours, is the telephone still a rather frightening, expensive toy? Certainly visitors to Manchester from abroad occasionally express surprise at the smallness of its telephone directory.

There are, of course, semi-anonymous ways of opening a telephone conversation. One of them goes something like this: " Is that Mr. X ? " " Oh—I wonder—could I speak to Mr. Y ? " To be successful, this opening should convey the flattering, even intimate, implication that the one who has answered the call must know who the speaker is. Sung on the right speech-melody, this can be very attractive.

The brief announcement: " This is X," " X speaking," and the continental " X here," all seem to me a little brusque, occasionally truculent, though it is hard to see how they could be made much more personal, unless one intones in such a way that the caller immediately identifies one's voice. This is done occasionally, with great success, though it is not without risks. The voices of mothers and daughters, for example, are apt to re-semble each other, and the telephone masks differences.

All these remarks refer to behaviour in telephoning. But what happens in your mind when answering the telephone? You hear, but have a little trouble in identifying a voice? Do you picture the speaker in your mind's eye? I think that such imaging is the experience of many, but not of all. A frequent visualizer myself, I am rather surprised that telephone-voices (unlike radio-voices) often evoke no mental picture of their owners.

Perhaps the imperfect reproduction partly accounts for this. Even when I speak to a close friend, if his telephone-voice is indistinct or sounds unlike his natural one, no visual image may arise.

Such a lack of intimacy on the telephone is not without its advantages. Expressing a contrary opinion, asserting authority, or imparting unwelcome news is sometimes easier when the person addressed is invisible, since his facial changes, which might be disturbing, are unseen, and perhaps not even inferred. Moreover, the feeling that your face and posture cannot be seen may impart a certain free-and-easiness to your demeanour and mental attitude. If you have to keep the distant subscriber waiting while you look up an engagement book, you may not suffer that feeling of being hunted which you experience when deciding matters while some one waits in your actual presence for the verdict.

To what extent have the English developed a code of manners and customs for telephone conversations? Do they, when telephoning, use any special phrases? Ought they to? Is the absence of such phrases resented by the ordinary telephone user, or only by the few? Am I, for example, unduly sensitive when a man who scarcely knows me, ringing up on a fine Saturday afternoon to ask a favour which will involve me in hours of work, begins, "Is that X? Well, look here . . ." ? Is it churlish to reflect that if he had written a letter it would have begun and ended courteously, and that had he called at my house without an appointment he would probably have opened with an apology?

Has the explosive " Listen ! " which one hears on all sides nowadays been borrowed from American films, and is it used more by imperious (or would-be imperious) women than by men ? Do some wily people employ verbal endearments more often on the telephone than when face to face ? Are some friendly souls paralysed by the instrument, and for this reason sound stand-offish ? Can one justifiably interpret all these impressions from the mere sounds, their verbal meaning and their speech-melody ? Occasionally, yes, but how often ? A curt voice, suggesting the wisdom, if not the safety, of immediate obedience, sometimes telephones, " Is that the X's ? Can I speak to Y ? " If the owner of the voice were seen when saying this, he would almost certainly be speaking with smiles and friendly gestures ; but how is a stranger to know this ?

Here is an interesting problem in tact. Who should terminate the telephone conversation ? The P.M.G. is unhelpful here. Presumably the initiator should also finish, and on a trunk call he does for financial reasons. Yet on an ordinary call, since he may be the more-interested of the two in the subject broached, he is less likely to cut it short, and, if " shut up " by the answerer, may decide never to raise that question again.

In what words does one finish ? There are conventional phrases, " Well, I'll be seeing you ! " " All right then."   " Let me know if I can help you further." Consulted on this point, the directory's lips appear to be sealed. We are supposed to know. But do we ?

CONVERSATIONAL TACT

WHAT is tact? One dictionary defines it as "nice perception, specially in seeing exactly what to say or do in given circumstances." The word suggests that one who exhibits tact is "in touch." It is noteworthy that, in the definition, "say" precedes "do," and since it is seldom necessary to be tactful when talking to oneself, tact in conversation is obviously meant.

The psychological problem of conversational tact may be approached "from inside outwards," or from "outside inwards." We may ask, "When am I tactful or tactless?" When I am behaving tactfully, how often is my conduct deliberate and the result of insight, as when steering a car? How often does it arise from mere habit, *e.g.* when I refrain from asking inquisitive questions, or use a socially approved phrase to question the accuracy of an hotel bill? How often does tact express one's attitude towards a whole class of situations, as when an army officer, who in the course of routine says "just the right thing," asserts that he has never thought much about it?

Such introspective evidence might be supplemented valuably by opinions obtained from others concerning

one's own conversational tact. These, of course, would be subject to the proviso that tact is a matter of time and place, as J. M. Barrie suggests in *The Admirable Crichton*, and G. B. Shaw in *Pygmalion*. Tact is a " bio-social " personality-sign, *i.e.* it involves the observer as well as the observed. The hostess who occasionally reshuffles her guests may be regarded as tactful by a bored couple; tactless by people interested in each other. Refraining from asking personal questions may be called tactful by some ; stand-offish and introverted by others.

Let us for a moment regard conversational tact objectively, as a mere pattern of movement-patterns. Gramophone records of some tactful conversations would give a very imperfect impression, for many signals of tact are visual. Raising or refraining from raising the eyebrows, presenting a sympathetic or inscrutable face, settling into one's chair as if to invite the *vis-à-vis* to make a long speech ; rising suddenly as if to indicate its termination ; none of these events is transmissible by radio without television. Subtler, however, and often less easy to study are speech-sounds made tactfully. The words and phrases, intonation, speech-melody, all are important ; yet their choice depends so much upon local convention, the relative social status of the conversers, the district in which the phrase is used,[1] that to interpret them requires expert knowledge. At times, an important feature of conversational exchange may be a momentary physical contact of the conversers. A touch, a hand on

[1] Would an Englishman, just landed in America, gauge the sympathy in a " level " voice saying, " Isn't that just too bad ? "

the shoulder, a handshake, or its omission, when meeting
or parting—all these gestures, especially the handshake,
need to be translated, and the translation should be an
up-to-date one. A book would be necessary to depict
the subtleties of this behaviour in England alone. It
could be written only by a careful observer with ex-
tensive experience of behaviour in our socially stratified
but increasingly cosmopolitan population.

An interesting problem of conversation is afforded by
the choice of words used in greeting, *e.g.* the peasant's
" Grüss Gott ! " the hearty phrases—often spiced with
affectionate insult—of the good fellow and the Rotarian ;
and the avoidance of verbal greeting in certain communi-
ties, like some residential colleges and officers' messes.
The behaviour is often defined or codified in these
circles on the ground that the taciturn ones are always
meeting each other, but it causes heartburning when,
as often happens, such Trappists treat the lesser breeds in
the same way.

The English social psychologist notes with interest
. the friendly assurance, " I'm very pleased to meet you,
Mr. X," he receives from Americans, who in pronounc-
ing his name make it easier to remember ; and the
avoidance of any such phrase by members of several
classes of English society, though a few seem allowed
to say when parting that they *have* been pleased. In
some groups, people's awareness that they have, or have
not, been introduced affects their behaviour when
beginning or avoiding conversation, but since almost
every one from another country who writes about

English peculiarities describes in detail our negative antics when in the presence of strangers, it is unnecessary to do more than to mention this fact here.

In civilized society, certain emollient phrases are recognized and used habitually ; " I wonder if . . ." when addressed to a suitable person in the appropriate tone usually makes him stop what he is doing and listen. To discuss when, how, and by whom the imperative " Listen ! " is used would require a chapter. Sometimes its effect is pleasant ; often infuriating. The importance of emollient phrases is hardly noticed in one's own social circle, but a visit to a foreign country with a difficult language demonstrates how lost one may feel without them. Almost certainly some nations use more of them than others.

Here are a few hints of situations in which such phrases are commonly used :

You are in a dining-car full of people. They are, or appear to be, oblivious to the fact that there is a howling draught from an open window. How would you suggest to the person next to the window that you would like it closed ?

You are staying for a short time with people whom you do not know very well. You wish to lunch with an old friend of yours who, you find, lives near by. What phrase would you use to your hostess to intimate this ?

In a general conversation, A makes a serious misstatement in the presence of B, a recognized expert on the subject under discussion. If you were B, how would you contradict A ?

In a general conversation, how do you change the subject ?

You have been asked to look up the friend of an acquaintance, who has come to live near to you, and to give him some friendly advice and help. You do so. Knowing him only slightly, how would you close the conversation and leave ?

The choice of phrase may throw light upon one's sex, age, social status, and occupation. For example, asked what he would say if he felt a draught when in a train, a friend from a Dominion declared that he would invariably say, " What about shutting that window ? " He has a gruff voice and corresponding manners and appearance. That phrase is just the one I should expect from him. I should make mental allowances for it because I know and like him, but others might not. As a matter of fact a few don't.

Fashions regulate the use of some phrases ; " I'd love to, but . . ." is, or was, a fairly common way of declining reluctantly. The Dutch writer G. J. Renier, in *The English: Are They Human?* warns visitors to our country that an Englishman who says, " I'm afraid there isn't a telephone in the house," does not mean that he fears that if he should enter his own hall he would find the telephone missing. Occasionally, it is interesting to note in a speaker's opening phrase a marked descent to the other's social level, followed immediately by an ascent to the ivory tower : " I say, *isn't* there a filthy draught from that window ? I wouldn't mind in the ordinary way, but I've just had 'flu. . . ." Up

goes the window, and soon, too, the speaker's news-paper. Many such phrases must be learnt if one is to behave diplomatically, especially towards people in or from other countries. An up-to-date collection (with commentary) of such sentences in the chief modern languages would be invaluable. It might be wise for the compiler to hurry up while there are still some polite manners left.

How far is the act of questioning one's *vis-à-vis* re-garded as good taste? One "naturally"—often very clumsily—questions a little child, but, for most persons, asking questions of an adolescent or an adult is less easy. Probably the prevailing "culture-pattern" sets the standard in this respect. In pre-Hitler Germany one got used to being asked questions by strangers about one's age, profession, and family. In England this would have been surprising. One may, perhaps, regard the Ameri-can's front porch as symbolic.

"To question or not to question" is important in any consideration of the duties of hospitality. I could instance a psychotherapist who had developed the technique of looking interested, allowing the visitor to pour out his story; seldom interrupting, but selecting the "gist"; using all the professional devices. Some people thought him a poor host, since he hardly ever actively in-quired about his guest's wife, children, their ages, welfare, and general prospects. His defence, "They usually tell me anyhow," was regarded as unsatis-factory.

One cause of reluctance to ask questions may be the

feeling that the after-effect of giving and getting confidential information may be unpleasant for both parties. When the relation between the confidant and the person questioned, unlike that of psychotherapist (or priest) and patient, is not intimate and privileged, but is little more than bare acquaintance, a mental " distance " may subsequently separate the conversers. The one who confessed may regret his action, and may not be consoled by reflecting that the confidant is merely in a position of authority or is a father-surrogate.

" Uptake " in conversation offers interesting problems. The act of taking a hint is easy to describe but hard to analyse. Sometimes the mental processes involved in it are those commonly described by testers of " intelligence," and occasionally—too seldom, perhaps—an intelligence test contains a challenge of the kind which is received, or given, while conversing. Often, however, a conversational challenge is not merely cognitive ; and many people, intelligent when judged from academic standpoints, are emotionally slow in the uptake. To achieve harmony with a speaker, one must sympathize and " empathize " (" feel oneself into ") his situation so that one's mind follows paths similar to his. Failing to do this is one form of shyness ; introverting oneself just when the other hints that extraversion is desired. This usually occurs because the person addressed resents the invasion of his mental privacy at a moment when he happens to be disinclined to respond. This situation is accurately portrayed by Miss Ann Bridge in *Illyrian Spring* when the shy lad of twenty-two suddenly tells

the sophisticated woman of forty a gay story about his old uncle :

> " He glanced rather shyly at Lady Kilmichael after telling his story, to see how she would take it. One of the rather crucial moments in any relationship between two highly-civilized people is the making of the first even slightly *risqué* joke. Nothing kills an incipient liking more effectually, rouses a more violent sense of affront and distaste, than to have an impropriety, however funny, forced on one by a person from whom one is not yet ready to accept it. On the other hand, the first sharing of a slightly improper joke marks a definite step forward in any acquaintance. In this instance Nicholas Humphries had judged exactly right—the story itself, and the rather shy comicality of his expression as he told it, amused Grace Kilmichael enormously. And she rightly regarded his telling it as a mark of confidence."

Most of us have many stylized conversations with professional colleagues or with friends in our own " set." Accounts of such exchanges, habitual to the speakers, but novel, striking, pleasing, or displeasing to the auditors, would be useful to social psychologists. Conversations in the fighting services, in some educational institutions, between shop assistants (who are often bilingual), might be valuably studied. Interesting points to be examined would be the number and nature of introductory and valedictory phrases, and the relative amount of technical or telescoped language ; to what extent the speaker when addressing one person seems aware of the presence of others. Members of certain conversational circles are characterized by psychic blindness to the presence of non-participants only a yard away, and by the openers' habit

of stopping abruptly as soon as they have got the information they want. Leslie Howard's Professor Higgins in the film version of Mr. Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* looks as if he would waste few words on subjects or people which did not interest him. Characteristic of some stylized conversations is obedience to the maxim, "Never apologize; never explain" (though it may alienate hearers who have never heard of this principle), with the implied assumption that conventions and slang current in the speaker's set are accepted everywhere. Since this feature of other people's conversations is usually annoying, they are psychologically interesting. English people sometimes return from service in India permanently encrusted with these conversational barnacles. But they are not difficult to acquire at universities nearer home. The hearer usually is not annoyed by this if he forms no part of the group using these intimate *clichés*, but only if he is forced unwillingly to take part in a game, so to speak, for which he does not hold the necessary cards, and the moves in which he understands only imperfectly.
· It would be profitable to discover the parts of a conversation which different types of hearer consider to be friendly or unfriendly. Is it possible to relate them to facial expression (frowning, smiling, "intelligent," wooden, or enigmatic), to a particular sort of intonation, *e.g.* booming on important words, or to expressive speech-melodies ? If a clergyman, when praying, addresses the Deity, or in the pulpit exhorts his congregation, in tones usually reserved for untidy cadets on parade, he will alienate some members of his congregation. He may

have grown unconscious of this repellent behaviour, yet he must once have admired this manner of speaking sufficiently to copy it.

We have seen that an important factor in tactful behaviour consists in using certain phrases, which, if they demand little thought, may be called speech-habits, and regarded as " mere " muscular responses. Usually, however, subjective factors enter into conversational tact, and they are none the less important because their presence cannot be objectively demonstrated. Such a factor may be, for example, the use of mental imagery, visual, auditory, or muscular. It helps to " foresee " (note the verb) the way in which a conversation is likely to go. For instance, one may suspect that an opener's remark, if encouraged by an answer, will later on require one to make a definite promise (" Don't you think the Society for So-and-so is very useful ? " may mean, " Won't you speak at their next meeting ? "), or that an apparently vague general comment is an implied request, which, if directly refused, may create a difficult situation. Awareness of this kind is often carried by visual imagery ; and when it is not, the question, " What is its vehicle ? " is interesting. Occasionally, when one expects a conversation in which it is possible but undesirable to become angry, one imaginatively rehearses the encounter. For me this is difficult, because I do it chiefly with visual imagery ; which, however, is inadequate. Conceivably, verbalizers who easily imagine probable remarks and their appropriate answers can meet the situation more efficiently when it arises.

Little has been written about that important turn in the conversation, the interruption.[1] If a soliloquy is ever to lead to a conversation it must stop somewhere. Whether it is ended by the initiator, or guillotined, sandbagged or subtly deviated by the other man, is an important consideration. In some kinds of talk, interruption is not welcomed. A superior in rank, addressing his inferior, assumes that he will be heard to the end of his paragraphs. Often he makes them short, with obvious endings. If interrupted, he expects a conventional phrase. An expert, asked for an opinion, does not expect to be interrupted lightly, and if he is, he may cease to trouble about the way in which he gives the information, since the questioner does not appear to have been listening. This at least is how one kind of expert behaves. Another, hardened perhaps by experience, vouchsafes his information in gusts, with patient, expectant pauses.

These differences of exposition can often be seen in the varied techniques used by lecturers. Some, who do not expect to be interrupted, prepare the discourse in a logical order, a thought-unity, which an unexpected question would probably drive from their minds. Others welcome occasional interruption, as a sign that the questioner is attending. This, however, cannot always be assumed, for he may have misunderstood because of inattention. Sometimes he is showing off by pointing out a slip which most of the audience has seen ; occasionally, though virtuous, he is the worst-informed or the least intelligent member. A lecture delivered with a wary eye upon

[1] Cf. *The Maturing Mind*, pp. 83–86.

possible interrupters is a special kind, and not always the best kind of lecture, just as walking in the country with an objective, though one is still enjoying the scenery, is not the same behaviour as crawling along looking out for snipers. A school lesson certainly is often given with solicitude for the abilities of slow movers in the convoy, but a lesson is not a lecture.

Motives for interrupting conversations may be classed as friendly and unfriendly. Friendly interruption, assuring the speaker that he has a listener, shows all transitions between definite verbal assurance and a mere grunt. Half-friendly interruption is common amongst professional thinkers. Sometimes it is necessary, as when the speaker is asked to give evidence for or to illustrate his general assertion. Occasionally it is just a trick which began as an honest desire to question, and degenerated into the habitual use of a *cliché* to gain time. One of its forms is, "But what do you *mean* by so-and-so?" If the speaker is thus invited to define bolshevist, radical, capitalist, or subversive, this interpolation may be justified. In certain contexts, however, it causes sympathetic remembrance of the professor who interrupted an interrupter with, "You know perfectly well what the mind is!"

A "quarter-friendly" form of interruption is, "But . . ." followed by the mention of a difficulty, when the speaker begins to outline some scheme which might interfere with the interrupter's habits. These "buts" are often an introvert's technique of warding off threats to his mental comfort.

Any one of these ways of interrupting, used often enough, may become a habit, with its characteristic mechanical repetition and semi-awareness. Such ways of behaviour have important social effects, since to be known as a " good listener " or a regular interrupter is an important aspect of personality.

One form of friendly interruption by the unsophisticated is to offer an illustration, or to mention a person or place brought into the listener's mind by simple association. There is the story of the lady who, when some one asserted that women take everything personally, interrupted with, " Oh, but *I* never do ! " Not only the listener's degree of education, but his temporary state of mind may determine whether he will interrupt. In listening to the spate of abstractions in the dictators' orations, many people must wish they could ask for or be allowed to supply a concrete example now and then.

Little need be said about the deliberately unfriendly interruption, like the election heckler's. It frequently contains one or more of the dishonest tricks of argument studied in Dr. R. H. Thouless's *Straight and Crooked Thinking.*

Let us see his illustration of one of these tricks and the way in which the speaker is advised to deal with it :

" A statement of the form ' all A is B ' is very rarely true and is very easily disproved. It is easily disproved for the obvious reason that a single instance of an A that is not B is sufficient to overthrow it. If, for example, a man maintains that all pacifists are cowards, his opponent need point to only one pacifist who has shown courage by facing death bravely and his opponent's case is overthrown. If, on the other hand, his

opponent had maintained the more moderate proposition that some pacifists are cowards, he could not have been defeated, for he could undoubtedly have brought forward one or more examples of pacifists who were cowards and his contention would then be established.

" This suggests that, in an argument, a man who maintains an extreme position (such as 'all A is B') is in a very unfavourable position for a successful controversy. Many people consciously or unconsciously adopt a trick based on this principle. This is the trick of driving their opponents to defend a more extreme position than is really necessary for their purpose. Against an incautious opponent this can often be done simply by contradicting his more moderate assertions until in the heat of controversy he boldly puts forward more and more extreme ones.

" A person cautious in argument will not, however, be so easily led to court defeat. He will constantly reaffirm the moderate and defensible position with which he started, and the extreme statements of his opponent will be rebutted by evidence instead of leading him on to equally extreme statements on the other side. Against such a person, however, a similar trick is used very commonly in a more blatantly dishonest way. He has asserted moderately and truly that 'some A is B,' but his opponent argues against the proposition that 'all A is B.' If he answers his opponent's arguments at all, he can only do so by defending the proposition, 'all A is B.' Then he has fallen into the trap. If he avoids this by reasserting his original position, his opponent often brings against him a particularly meaningless piece of sophistry which runs, 'But you ought logically to say that all A is B if you think some A is B.'

" Let us call this device the 'extension' of one's opponent's proposition. It can be done either by luring him on to extend it himself in the heat of the arguments or, more impudently, by misrepresenting what he said. It is a very common trick, often done involuntarily. The remedy is always to refuse to accept any extension, but to reaffirm what one originally said."

The words with which an interruption is prefaced or made are psychologically interesting. Some people never interrupt formally without using the name or title of the person addressed, or informally without some affectionate or familiar appellation.

It may be thought that this discussion of interruption treats a trivial matter too ponderously. Yet there are serious differences of opinion about the desirability of interruption, *e.g.* in the techniques of education. Some critics hold that adult classes, for example, ought not to be addressed by the tutor in a fluent stream of words, as if he considered himself an oracle ; others believe adult classes to be so heterogeneous that a point which happens to interest one interrupter may bore every one else.

What are the psychological characteristics of amusing conversation ? In writing about this subject I find a difficulty. It concerns the attitude which psychologists often take towards the fact that in most social groups, when a fair degree of safety from physical risk has been attained (and in many where it has not), there is a desire for entertainment or amusement. This is satisfied by conversation, which requires no apparatus or trained professionals. Now, ability to converse entertainingly may bring its possessor popularity or the distrust and suspicion of others. Perhaps the belief is commoner nowadays than it used to be, that many strong silent men have nothing to say.

Amusing conversation is worthy of the psychologist's study, and to indicate, designate, and describe his subject-matter is obviously the duty of a scientific worker. Yet

few social psychologists, except those mentioned on pp. 20–24 of this book, have written anything about amusing conversation. Possibly many of them believe that no contribution to science ought to be amusing. This may be true if the assertion relates to the manner of exposition, but the behaviour of an amused person is as open to scientific study as that of a frightened one. And, just as one attempts to describe events which produce fear, one may proceed similarly with amusing situations. The result, however, may be that scientists will not take the investigator seriously. This will deter him only if he believes in 1939 that to be taken seriously by that kind of scientist is invariably something of which to be proud.

CONVERSATIONS WITH ONESELF

Do you talk to yourself ? " Never, or hardly ever," you answer. " I do," says your friend, " always, or nearly always." Perhaps, before this intimate question was asked, neither of you had suspected how queer the other one was.

Let us consider this matter, first from the mentally silent person's point of view. Suppose him to be thinking, " It's two o'clock on a lovely autumn afternoon. Shall I go at once into the sunshine—it's getting shorter every day—and come back to write ? Why not ? Because if I do, I shall come in feeling pleased with life, but the writing mood will have vanished; scribbling will seem silly. I'll wait till four. The sun may have gone in ? I'll risk that ; I shall be two hours' writing to the good, anyway. I've had my summer holiday . . ." ; and so on.

This exhibition of his thoughts may suggest that the silent one is, after all, rather garrulous. On the contrary ; though it had to be expressed in words in order to appear in a book, his meditation was carried by a series of momentary visual images. You can scarcely expect

him to draw them, but if he did, the static sketches [1] would not convey a dynamic meaning, unless he had the talent of Fougasse. His conflict may be almost wordless, but why not ? While he " thinks it out " the sun actually shines into his window and forms a real peg on which to hang his first thoughts ; in his mind's eye the walk is symbolized by a mental picture of a park flowerbed ; four o'clock by visual images of his watch and of the park clock; "not feeling like writing" by unsatisfied tension, chiefly in the leg muscles, which seem to demand exercise ; " writing " by an image of sheets of paper awaiting him. Words, therefore, seem unnecessary.

What are the possible advantages of using visual vehicles for one's thinking ? Perhaps greater speed, and almost certainly intenser effective colouring. The drawbacks may not be obvious in a mental conflict like that described above. If, however, the thinker meditates a course of action to be guided chiefly not by hedonic but by ethical, legal, or economic considerations, the uses of verbal soliloquy seem unquestionable, though the verbalizer may attach unsuitable emotional meanings to the words which he uses.

Being visited by few internal conversations, I am illequipped to write about them, except from hearsay. Here are, however, some interesting psychological problems which they suggest. First, do all young children

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[1] Drawings partly illustrating a conflict more complex than that discussed above are given in the author's *The Place of Imagery in Mental Processes*. 1937. Manchester. (University Press.)

talk to themselves frequently ? If they do, this is important. Yet, until many observations have been made of unsuspecting children when they are thinking, dogmatic assertions are unjustified. According to Professor Jean Piaget,[1] " a large number of people, whether from the working classes or from the more absent-minded of the intelligentsia, are in the habit of talking to themselves, of keeping up an audible soliloquy," and, referring to P, a little subject of $6\frac{1}{2}$ years, who talked " while drawing a tramcar with carriages in tow," he observes, " When P says, ' They don't have any flags,' he is not speaking to any one. He is thinking aloud over his own drawing, just as people of the working classes mutter to themselves over their work."

It would seem, therefore, that Professor Piaget attributes audible monologue to children, the uneducated, and the absent-minded intelligentsia. Professor J. B. Watson's theory of thinking depends upon the supposition that the child not only habitually talks aloud, but is reproved by parents for doing so.

. I cannot remember ever being reproved for talking to myself, or indeed that I often did so. I recollect my surprise and interest, as a schoolboy, to hear an older person talking to himself when he did not know he was overheard. I often feel that words are but makeshift expressions for my thoughts, and smile when I read books written by a friend who supplies almost all his nouns with adjectives, many of which seem misfits to me. I suspect that my thinking, *e.g.* about international relations, is

[1] *The Language and Thought of the Child.* 1926. (Kegan Paul.)

determined too much by pictures of politicians and too little by words.

For people who seldom soliloquize, the words which occasionally enter their consciousness may signify reproof, praise, or advice directed at themselves : " Idiot ! " " Not so bad ! " " Steady ! " " Keep it up ! " It would seem that, as David and Rosa Katz have suggested in *Conversations With Children*, conscience may owe its development to early "self-conversation." The " still small voice " is a common experience for many people, but not for all. As June E. Downey writes in *Creative Imagination : Studies in the Psychology of Literature* :

> " To reflect, to meditate, to think, is, to a great degree, to talk to oneself, but in what varying accents ? Does your inner voice, for example, assume the characteristic tone-quality of your speaking voice or does it adopt the very different intonations of some one else's voice, or is it wholly without colour ? How often for you does internal speech become internal song ? Is your voice a projected voice heard from a distance ? If so, does it sound from your right side or your left ? Specifically, in whose voice does conscience speak ? Your own ? Perhaps, instead, conscience adopts the inflections of a censorious neighbour or of a querulous grandfather. Not always, however, is the inner voice one of conscience ; it may be the voice of the mocker or that of a very literal-minded critic. Or your garrulous self may indulge in long internal soliloquies which easily pass over into actual sound when circumstances permit, and indicate that a soliloquy is not a mere dramatic convention, but, on occasions, a very natural form of behaviour.
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> " As common as the soliloquy is, perhaps, the internal dialogue, for often our thinking dramatizes itself, and the inner voice speaks in more than one character-rôle. Various relations may exist between the two different characters, depending upon

the form of the inner speech. For both characters the inner speech may be motor, but more strongly so for the first person of the dialogue, with whom the thinker identifies himself, than for the second. Or an auditory form of the inner speech may interplay with the motor, in which case the thinker identifies himself with the latter and treats the acoustic process as an intruder. Again, the inner speech may be wholly auditory, with the possibility of intrusion of many voices, with one or none of which the thinker identifies himself.

" In the writer's own case, the inner speech during thought proceeds usually in dialogue fashion, in which one voice is that of Me, the thinker proper, a serious-minded, workaday individual ; the second voice is that of the critic. This second voice is more highly pitched than the first, and much more ironical and facetious. Its apparent function is to interrupt the first speaker, to question her conclusions, to interject mocking comments."

Conscience, however, does not necessarily admonish, guide, or threaten the adult by taking the form of a speaker in a subjective conversation. In some minds it has no size, shape, or apparent location, and certainly no voice. Often, however, it is momentarily symbolized by visual images of expressions on the faces of people who would approve or disapprove an imagined course of behaviour. A visualizer may contemplate a line of action which causes him to picture A as disapproving sternly, B as resenting silently, C as praising obsequiously, and D as just laughing. Probably he could not as quickly or as easily call up the different phrases in which their opinions would have been expressed.

Some years ago, Professor Cyril Burt wrote to me about verbal imagery, and very kindly allows me to

reproduce extracts from our correspondence. I select those illustrating points which other writers have not treated, especially as they relate to privileges and limitations of the predominantly visual or verbal types of mind. Occasionally, but not often, I have taken the liberty of shortening sentences and omitting irrelevancies in the letters. (In the quotations below, *B.* stands for Burt, *P.* for Pear.)

" *B.* On page 64 of *Remembering and Forgetting* (Methuen, 1922) you write '. . . One of the visualizer's chief troubles when thinking is frequently his comparative poverty in language habits. Talking to himself, either vocally or subvocally, may occur so seldom to a well-marked visualizer that when it happens in moments of stress, it may startle him.' Could you give me a line or two indicating the evidence for this statement ? Is it your own first-hand experience ?

" The point interests me particularly, because I belong so very definitely to the very opposite type. Although I constantly have to rely on visual imagery for practical purposes, it is with me extraordinarily faint and sketchy; and almost all my actual thinking is carried on by means of inner speech. So far from being startled if I caught myself talking to myself, I should be startled if I caught myself not talking to myself. So far as I am aware, when I am not talking to other people, I am engaged in a life-long soliloquy. If I am staring about me, admiring the scenery and the weather, the comments are almost immediately framed in words ; but, more likely than not, I am describing some past experience or rehearsing

some future letter or an imaginary interview with a person I am going to meet. At certain periods in my life I believe I have sometimes talked aloud. You, however, by 'talking to oneself' mean, I suppose, the mental imagery of speech, not actually muttering or sub-muttering, though your reference to 'moments of stress' suggests that possibly you do mean a half-ejaculated 'damn.'

"P. The remark on page 64 of *Remembering and Forgetting* describes my first-hand experience. You will notice that I say a visualizer may be comparatively poor in language *habits*. By that I mean that stereotyped expressions may not occur easily to him. This is some-times a source of strength as well as of weakness, for occasionally he finds that, in spite of himself, he must coin a phrase which appears to others to be original. . . .

"I wish I could convey to you the dissatisfaction I nearly always feel when I employ an unusual word ; it seems no more to fit the meaning I want than a ready-made suit, snatched at random from the peg, might fit you or me. As a consequence, I often reject it after long (pictorial) consideration of its meaning. For instance, to-day, while writing about subtle and complex skills, the word 'subtle' is carried for me by all kinds of images— tenuous things, gauze, mist, Debussy's music, Nijinsky, Japanese prints, Henry James, Proust, the serpent . . . but I am trying to write about skills like that of a lawyer or a superlatively good hostess. The shift in meaning which is required is nearly always carried by a picture of the actual incident, or by some stylized image (*e.g.* of

Nijinsky as a faun) which conveys the meaning. I may have to use the phrase 'subtle *or* elusive,' though I know perfectly well that an eel, for example, is elusive but seldom subtle. This word 'subtle' as applied to a certain number of skills (*i.e.* not the extensive or 'coarse' ones), must have come very late in my thinking, and I would not go to the stake for it.

"In ordinary, everyday thinking, I do not usually put my images into words. If left to myself (*i.e.* if I don't have to communicate my thoughts to some one else) my planning and thinking are almost entirely pictorial, but not photographic. Nearly all my images are semi-abstract. For example, I want to go to Zürich in a few weeks. I habitually think of it in the kind of 'poster-map-picture' which has become so common, and, though I have never been there, I 'know' that on the river there is a church like the Frauenkirche at Munich, and some distance away to the left, and above, must be the two university buildings. The hotel I want to stay at is on the other side of the river, among the shops. I have a perfectly definite image of those shops; though; since I have never seen a picture of the street, I have no way of knowing if it is correct. But these are the material with which I plan. The tariffs of the different hotels are apt to come into my mind in the actual print in which I have read them, with the colour and even the texture of the paper faithfully represented.

"I suddenly decided last night, on the way to a lecture, to talk about acquisitiveness. For the next few moments my plans were made entirely in pictures of Rivers

(W. H. R.) and my connection with him ; his article on the subject in *Psyche* ; a careful abstract of it which I once made and underlined for easy reference during lectures ; the drawer in which it lies, and so on. I doubt if a single word (even visualized) came into my mind from start to finish.

" So far as I can see, you must belong quite definitely to an opposite type. My imagery though often ' sticky,' [1] is not very often faint. I talk to myself only on occasions of great stress, and when a difficult decision has to be made at a few moments' notice. Even then, often I don't talk to myself at all. Lately, however, I have found it useful before attending a committee which is likely to be important for me, to mutter, on the way, phrases like ' Concede all the points, if necessary, except number 5,' or ' As soon as X has finished speaking ask him for his evidence,' or, ' Take a line and stick to it.'

" I hardly ever rehearse a letter or imagine an interview with a person. I have never begun to plan the draft of a novel. I think one reason for this may be that imagining the conversation might be difficult, though I don't think impossible, for me.

" By ' talking to oneself' on page 64, I mean actually talking, vocally or sub-vocally. But I know what it is to *image* vocally, and sometimes if I have to prepare a speech quickly, I may run over the phrases in my mind. Uusally I do not, but have noticed, before broadcasting, where phrases are unusually important, that I can do so.

[1] Perhaps " recalcitrant " is a better word.

"Head (Sir Henry) has suggested that the presence of visual images may actually hinder the discovery of words —I think that is very true of me, for often the meaning of a situation is so completely clear, through a visual image, that I do not think of expressing it in words. When some one asks me to do so, I am often surprised at the word which ' comes.' How that word comes, and where it comes from is another matter.

" *B.* It is very clear that my mental panorama is very different from yours. You say that your planning and thinking are almost entirely pictorial. I should say that almost all my planning and thinking are verbal, not vaguely verbal, but quite definite sentences. If I am thinking about my engagements for the day, it is all briefly summarized to myself almost as fully as if I were explaining the matter to another person. Sometimes these verbal rehearsals go on inside my brain almost of themselves, so that I occasionally get quite annoyed with the process. My brain will go on composing letters or rehearsing interviews sometimes for hours on end. This will happen very frequently if I am excessively fatigued or suffering from insomnia. As I drop off to sleep quite another gear is switched on, and quite sharply I find myself in a pictorial world in which everything seems worked out in terms of mental imagery, and the images convey meanings in a most ridiculous fashion, *e.g.* last night, after a clear picture of Mr. A. and Mrs. B. dining at table in an imaginary restaurant, I saw $\oplus$ [Q.], with a feeling of my finger pointing or tapping at [Q.], which was not part of the image. This meant I must

invite Miss C. to join us ; presumably the diagram represents four people at a circular table—but it seemed rich in meaning. This state of mind seems to me almost as incoherent as a nocturnal dream, and, though sometimes amusing, is quite useless to me for any practical purposes.

"I think if I considered my life exhaustively, I should find that visual images were of practical use only for quite definite purposes. For example, if I want to find things or to describe where things are to be found, or to explain a route across town, then I definitely use visual imagery. Since my visual imagery is rather untrustworthy I am very apt to make mistakes in this direction."

The everyday uses of internal speech are illustrated by these extracts. The theoretical interest for psychology of the differences between these ways of doing the "same" thing is considerable.

Dr. Marie Jahoda has suggested that since the average man probably visualizes more than the average psychologist does, my way of "thinking things out" may be commoner than those described in textbooks of psychology.[1] Professor Burt wrote, "Although you seem to be an exception among psychologists, I believe your type is by far the commonest in other branches of work. Artists, men of business, and a good many contemporary scientists seem to use visualization far more than the ordinary academic person. Teachers as a group, both at schools and at universities, seem to be mainly non-

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[1] *Cf.* T. H. Pear, "Mental Imagery and Style in Writing," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 1935, iv., pp. 453–67, and *The Place of Imagery in Mental Processes.*

visualizers. Perhaps that is why they take up teaching. Perhaps the fact that they have been brought up on bookwork has led to a decay of their visual powers." Professor June E. Downey reminds us of Professor E. B. Titchener, who in *The Experimental Psychology of the Thought Processes* describes his use of visual schemes in " thinking-out " a matter. He writes :

> " I rely, in my thinking, upon visual imagery in the sense that I like to get a problem into some sort of visual schema, from which I can think my way out, and to which I can return. As I read an article, or the chapter of a book, I instinctively arrange the facts or arguments in some visual pattern, and I am as likely to think in terms of this pattern as I am to think in words. I understand, and to that extent I enjoy, an author whom I can thus visualize."

Professor Downey comments upon Professor Titchener's remark that there is a serious temptation to allow such visual schemata to become rigid, and that he has constantly to fight against the tendency to premature systematization. She adds :

> " One can scarcely avoid making a connection here between this psychologist's type of mind and the kind of psychology he elaborated in so great detail. Surely his imaginal predispositions coloured his system." [1]

Says (Graham) Wallas in his stimulating attempt to apply psychology in his *The Great Society* :

> " Many men who now do hard intellectual work with some success have, like the late Duke of Devonshire, never acquired the power of following a verbal argument at all." And the

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[1] The remaining lines on this page and page 75 are also Professor Downey's.

author adds in a footnote, " In any case, men of the ' audible ' type of mind have a natural advantage, apart from training, over the ' visualizers ' (of whom the Duke was probably one) in oral argument."

What investigator has not contrasted the slow, almost measured report of a concrete visualizer with the rapid fluent description of a word-thinker ? What teacher has not seen the latter type shine in oral recitation to the disadvantage of his more deliberate classmate, but later outclassed in some form of constructive work ?

In my own experience I have found imaginal trends significant in countless ways. To quote from a former description :

"I may cite a talented girl, preoccupied to an extraordinary degree with the sound qualities of the external world and the sound images of the inner. This preoccupation is evident in composition in her choice of musical words, her sensitiveness to rhythmic and melodic effects, and her modulations of voice in reading her very charming sketches. With this auditory preoccupation—a preoccupation so intense that she winces at harshness of voice-quality or hardness of phrasing—there goes a keen organic sensitiveness, but only dim and fugitive visual images. Her stories are charming in style, but vague in plot ; her characters, who speak to her in varied voices, rarely cross the threshold of the visible. Her productions possess emotional but not dramatic nuance ; and she finds it impossible to write a photo-play. She should excel in the personal essay and should be encouraged to try her hand at writing poetry. In contrast is a second student whose stories lack all charm of style, but who shows amazing facility when asked to outline scenarios for moving-pictures, because, as she informs me, it is just in true photo-play fashion that her visualized characters perform for her on the stage of her mind."

Historically, the psychological consideration of inner speech goes back at least to Salomon Stricker's *Studien über die Sprachvorstellungen* [1] and Victor Egger's *La Parole Intérieure : Essai de psychologie descriptive.* [2] Egger stated that his internal speech was absolutely continuous. At every working moment words coursed through his consciousness. When he was not speaking aloud, or listening to the speech of another person, he was always speaking inwardly. He believed that this statement was true of all adult persons. Dr. Wallace Craig comments, [3] " It probably is true, at least in a general way, of a large proportion of the population. . . . At any point in the day's activities, if I stop to introspect, I always find that I am thinking in words."

So far as I know, Dr. Craig is the latest psychologist to revive the question in this way. He has contributed most interestingly to our knowledge of inner conversation, by experiments upon himself, to find out whether it is possible for him to experience a wordless state of consciousness. He engaged in sketching (" an activity involving vivid, non-linguistic consciousness ") the corner of the room with its walls and furniture, and interrupted the sketching at times to examine his consciousness. Briefly, these are the findings (I quote from the article cited) :

> " (1) In sketching, the eye and the hand work under their own guidance. Sketching could never be completely controlled by speech. Indeed, much of it is untranslatable into speech.
> " (2) But the internal voice talks on and on. It speaks about

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[1] 1880, Vienna.   [2] 1881, Paris.   [3] 1936, Manchester.

the sketching, about the psychological problem which is under investigation, and about other matters which come surging into my thoughts. When attention is given intensely to the immediate work of the eye or the pencil, I believe that my internal speech is sometimes suspended for a few moments, but not longer than a few moments.

" (3) To a certain extent the sketching actually promotes internal speech, especially when there is some development easily expressed in words, as when I make a new observation on the construction of the furniture which I am drawing. The internal voice makes remarks such as : ' That line's *not* horizontal. . . . That partition's thicker than the other one.'

" (4) I try, with special effort, aided by holding the breath, to concentrate attention on a detail of the sketching, in order that all words may be forgotten. Under these conditions, even when all *words* are inhibited, I often find myself saying ' m, m ' with each movement of eye or hand, as if this ' m, m' could assist in guiding the work. Also there is at frequent intervals a second internal voice ; it is so quiet that it might escape observation, but it is urging on the whole psychic activity, saying : ' Hold your attention now. . . .'

" I have tried many such experiments, not only with sketching but also with other non-linguistic activities. I have engaged in thinking in terms of visual images ; for example, solving a problem in geometry, mentally, by means of the visual image. In all these experiments, the findings have been similar to those reported for the experience of sketching : although the principal activity is non-verbal, it is accompanied by a stream of words which is practically continuous.

" Thus Egger's thesis is essentially true in my case. Not only is my internal speech continuous, but I am unable to stop it for any considerable time, even when I try to do so. Although I can stop the flow of speech for a few moments, the wordless interval is usually no longer than a pause such as an orator may make in the midst of an oration. When I try to suppress words for a longer time, the internal voice still continues, singing,

or uttering expressive sounds such as ' m, m.' If I try to suppress all words by saying ' m, m, m . . .' continuously with the internal voice, then, before long, a second internal voice comes into play, speaking in words, commenting on the experiment.

" Some examples of internal speech are more subjective than others. Sometimes, in my experiments, when the obvious internal speech is eliminated for a few moments, I discover that there is a very quiet voice speaking, much deeper in the mind, and likely to be overlooked."

and

" An old memorandum, recently found, reminds me that I first noticed the continuous presence of internal speech when I was less than eleven years old—how much less is not known. At that early age, when the internal voice had nothing better to say, it repeated continuously : ' Whispers I to myself.' (Please pardon the careless grammar of boyhood.) This sentence was often reiterated in a regular rhythm, synchronous with the footsteps in walking."

and

" One psychologist whose experience differed from that of Egger, to a certain degree, was Salomon Stricker. He gives a clear statement on this matter in a passage (1880), which may be translated as follows :

" ' If, while awake, I wish to stop completely this feeling of apparent speaking or singing, I must cease to think in words or tones. Under some circumstances that is very difficult.'

"After doing literary work, it is very difficult to remain without word- or tone-ideas, even for a few minutes. But immediately after a walk in the open, or after viewing works of art, it is easy for me to allow myself to be dominated by memories of the visual forms. Just as easily, immediately after a pleasant bath, or other pleasant sense impression, I can give myself

completely, for some minutes, to memories of these impressions, without an idea of a single word or tone."

Dr. Craig, as part of his investigation, asked me certain questions about my mental imagery. The answers are given below :

" Q. 1. Are there periods when you have absolutely no internal speech ? Is there not even a very quiet voice in the background of consciousness ? Is there not even a very fragmentary speech, such as an occasional exclamation or short phrase ?

" A. 1. There are waking periods when I have no internal speech, so far as I can observe. When I experience mental tension and restlessness (as now, because to-morrow I have to give an introductory lecture to a new class whom I have never seen, still less ' sized up ') I think I should feel much more at ease if a phrase or two would come into consciousness. Usually my preparation for a lecture consists in summoning visual images of my notes, either in detail or in gross. At present, for example, I can ' see ' the typed title of a lecture ' The musical receptivity of the man in the street (Sabaneev),' then the magenta cover of an off-print. I doubt whether in these ' auditorily blank ' periods there is in the background of consciousness any voice, however quiet, for when I am worried or feeling off-colour, the imaged sound of my own admonishing or directing voice is striking. If the voice I hear is any one else's, I am always much interested, as this is a comparatively rare occurrence, though I have been specially concerned with voices for the last seven years.

" Q. 2. How long can such an absolutely wordless period endure ? Indefinitely ?

" A. 2. Indefinitely, I should say.

" Q. 3. Omitting the time spent in sleep, and the time spent in overt speech, what proportion of your time consists of these absolutely wordless periods ? (Just a rough estimate, please.)

" A. 3. Doubt if it is possible to say. At a rough guess, nine-tenths.

" Q. 4. Are you a purely visual reader ? Do you know of any other purely visual readers ?

" A. 4. Usually not quite purely visual, I think, but nearly so. Unfortunately I seldom mentally ' hear ' or ' speak ' the words, even in silently reading a beautifully written passage. I think this is partly due to a bad habit of skimming many books to see if they contain anything which bears on my special subjects—and of reading newspapers in a hurry. When I don't see a joke in *Punch* I usually suspect that the humour lies in some auditory word-play or misunderstanding due to the sound of a word. On re-reading, this surmise is frequently confirmed. In an un-reflective mood I often expect verses in *Punch* to be merely funny, and sometimes notice—too late—that they are beautiful. Perhaps this relative poverty of auditory imagery makes me enjoy especially hearing people speak English or German easily and beautifully, an actor like John Gielgud declaiming superbly, or Elisabeth Bergner ' breaking ' English charmingly. I have suspected that in preparing a lecture from printed matter, it might help to declaim the sentences in private, but I have been too ' lazy ' to try it (perhaps laziness in this respect itself presents a problem) so I depend upon visual cues, trusting to their clear-ness to evoke fairly suitable words when the time comes. But often they seem only *fairly* suitable. I don't know of any purely visual reader. (Perhaps the sub-editors of newspapers might.) "

Dr. Craig demonstrated by a simple experiment that a verbalizer can carry on two (or more) trains of speech simultaneously. He repeated the syllable " la " aloud continuously and at the same time counted the number of " la's."

". . . reporting when I have spoken 120 la's or any other chosen number. The counting is done by an internal voice, but when I report that that count has reached 120, and this number is

found to be correct, there is thus objective evidence that I was counting. This meets the behaviourist's objection to the earlier investigations, that the internal voice was known only by introspection.

" As to simultaneity : In the first place, I can make the sound of ' la la la . . .' so rapid and so continuous, it is impossible that the numbers, internally spoken, could come between the la's. In the second place, I can make sure, by introspection, that the internal voice speaks a number simultaneous with every la."

and

" Instead of using the syllable ' la,' I can use ' tay ' or ' kye ' or ' do ' or any other syllables or simple words. The important observation is made, that these do not interfere with the counting. This fact definitely disproves the theory that the internal speech consists of actual movements of the muscles of the vocal organs, because it is impossible that those muscles could be producing continuously the sound of ' la la la . . .' or ' tay tay tay . . .' or any other sound you care to select, and could at the same time be formulating the numbers, ' one, two, three,' and so on. It is physically impossible for a muscle to move in two directions at once.

" Now, whenever I try the experiment on multiple voices, a most interesting fact comes to light. There is always a third voice, more subjective than the other two. Running along concurrently there are : first, the overt voice ; second, the counting voice ; and third, what I shall call the commenting voice. This ' commenting ' voice issues comments and commands. It says, for example, ' Be careful ! . . . Are those la's continuous ? . . . Are you counting right ? . . . That was right. . . . That's fine. . . . There's what you wanted.' The comments thus tend to be brief and elliptical. They are difficult to report in detail. It is easy to observe the overt voice, because that is the voice of the bodily self. It is easy to observe the counting voice, because that also is highly objective. But it is difficult to report the exact words of the commenting voice,

because that is the voice of the thinker, the ego. When the ego tries to look back upon its past self to see what it *has* said, this same ego is moving forward into the new present time, and saying something new. The present words blot out the past words and make them difficult to remember.

" Under the conditions of this experiment, the overt voice and the counting voice are continuous, steady, monotonous. Both are highly automatic : they can go on speaking continuously even when the attention is turned away from them. In contrast, the commenting voice is not automatic : it is interrupted when the attention turns to the overt voice or to the counting voice. But it would be difficult for me (a verbalizer) to conceive of a consciousness in which the only words were ' la la la . . .' and ' one, two, three. . . .' That would seem to be a consciousness without any thinker ; a contradiction ! Hence, although I was at first surprised to find three voices in consciousness, I soon saw that the third voice was to be expected. No doubt the experiment will yield the same result in the case of any person who is a strong verbalizer."

It seems, therefore, certain that internal conversation is a common and important event in many people's lives. Other people, however, experience such conversation only on unusual occasions, and generally settle their mental conflicts in other ways. Perhaps, indeed, they envy the verbalizer's freedom from those special feelings of frustration in thinking which so often annoy the visualizer, and his relative coolness when he thinks with conventional words and phrases. Visualizers, on the other hand, find it easier to distinguish the simple type of " thinking " which is the mere exercise of speech-habits from that higher kind in which the words and phrases eventually used are novel for the thinker, and by no stretch of terminology could be called habitual.

It is assumed in at least one popular book of advice that most people can imagine conversations. They are therefore exhorted to prepare important conversations in advance. The advantages and disadvantages of this and other ways of thinking things out have never been sufficiently considered by psychologists.

REMEMBERING CONVERSATION

MANY of us believe that we can remember conversation. In what mental terms do we recall it ? What do we recall ? How much ? How faithfully ? With what degree of subjective certainty ? Some people can invent an imaginary conversation, or polish up the memory of an actual one. How is this done ? What psychological factors cause individual differences in such abilities ?

Let us first consider the process of recalling conversations. By many people the verbal contents of some conversations can be reproduced faithfully, if they are brief and consist almost entirely of short words. Even then the import of a conversation may depend upon the way in which its key-sentence was spoken. The quality and loudness of the sounds, the rising, level, or falling speech-melody, the intonation, the accompanying gestures and facial expressions rather than the " dictionary " meaning of the words may be the dominant factors. It is, therefore, not certain that even short conversations can be reproduced with complete fidelity. Imagine, for example, one which ended with, " Do just as you like, *I* don't mind," uttered in a tone and with gestures which might convey one meaning to hearer A and the opposite

to B. A month later, ask them to repeat the concluding phrase and you may get different answers.

Furthermore, if the conversation lasts more than a few minutes serious practical questions arise. For example, what percentage of ordinary people can recall such a conversation with verbal accuracy ? This question means exactly what it says. The usual " answer " to it is apt to be like this : Few would assume that any one but a memory-prodigy can remember the exact words of a long conversation, but any reasonably intelligent and attentive person may be expected to recall their " gist," which the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines as " real ground or point, substance or pith."

This reply begs a question. It assumes that nobody can remember with complete verbal accuracy ; an apparently reasonable supposition, but one which ignores the unusual rememberer, who might, in fact, be the principal witness in a law-court case. In view of the remarkable performances of memory-prodigies, the possibility that some people may remember long sentences with complete verbal accuracy must not be neglected. Again, the concept of " gist " is ambiguous. A conversation may have more than one " ground or point," and to extract its pith may require not only high ability for précis-making, which involves considerable intelligence, but also the activity of non-intellectual selective factors, " directive tendencies " and Freud's " Censorship." The tendencies to repress unpleasant experiences and to recall memory-material with a " regard for presentability " are widespread and probably normal. They can be easily

observed when we retail, to some one else, a heard conversation. How often do we give an impersonal summary of its gist when speaking formally to an official or a stranger, but drop into " direct oration " when addressing a friend, even an enemy, of the person " quoted " ! Yet sophisticated readers should remember that most uneducated people and many educated persons who live in small communities constantly use the phrase, " So I said . . . and she said."

It is therefore justifiable to regard sceptically any statement that So-and-so can remember " perfectly " what was said by and to him more than an hour before, if the conversation lasted more than a few minutes, and especially if it was coloured with emotion. From newspaper reports of law cases, it would appear that at times, when two men have argued heatedly about an important matter, and one has departed in a huff, the other, who feels, rightly or wrongly, that he is the cooler of the two, has made notes of the conversation. This may be a reasonable action from his point of view, especially if later the other man agrees that the notes are substantially correct. But what if he does not ? Can such an account be accepted as valid evidence ? Moreover, have there not been cases in which a sworn one-sided report of conversation was made weeks or months after the event ? Psychologists may distrust claims for the accuracy of such statements.

The reliability of a witness may be examined qualitatively or quantitatively. How does he remember his evidence ; what mental vehicles " carry " his know-

ledge ? All through the following discussion the great individual differences in the nature and functions of imagery should be kept in mind. This book is written by one in whom visualization is predominant, to whom " memories in the mind's ear " of spoken words come but rarely. In the present connection, such a characteristic has consequences which have not been adequately considered by psychologists. One of these can be illustrated here. My ability to retail a funny story depends in part upon whether its material can be carried by visual images. Humour depending upon situation is remembered easily and correctly. If, however, the *clou* of the joke is one word only, my rendering of the story may be pointless, unless I learn the key-word by heart.

Take, for example, the schoolboy's statement : " The Sadducees did not believe in spirits, but the Publicans did." In telling this story, I have hesitated before the last noun, because " Sadducees " tends automatically to recall " Pharisees," and until I first read this " howler," I possessed no visual image which could differentiate Pharisees from Publicans, in the Biblical sense of that term. Connected with this idiosyncrasy is the tendency to find puns boring unless they involve not only a play upon verbal sound, but an unexpected comic similarity in the visual images aroused. So there may be special causes connected with imagery, of an individual's quickness or slowness in the uptake.

For reasons like these, I suspect the truth of my own account of conversation ; even of its gist. If I reproduce it in " direct oration," it risks being embroidered in

colours which seem appropriate to the reported speaker, *e.g.* an American may be " made " to say words more picturesque than those which in fact he used.

In contrast, there are people whose auditory or audito-motor imagery is easily aroused. Yet it seems possible that as soon as one's own speech-muscles pronounce the words which another person is " remembered " to have said, this action may distort not only the manner, but also the matter of the original speech. Think of the stylized English which Frenchmen and London servant girls are supposed, by writers in English humorous journals, to use, or the sounds with which some American authors represent the efforts of upper-class Englishmen to express themselves.

Last night, in a train, I conversed with a friend for half an hour. Now, twenty-three hours later, I remember that we discussed local adult education. From a few remembered key-words : " weavers," " fustian-cutters," " the Board," and " vernacular," I can reconstruct part of what was for me, but not, perhaps, for the other man, the gist of our talk. I recall hardly anything of my own contribution. This fact suggests problems ; for example, is it usual to remember more of what one's *vis-à-vis* said than of one's own contribution, or does this distinction of the relative amounts depend chiefly upon the matter of the conversation and upon the participants' mental make-up ? I remember visual details of the experience ; the unexpectedly luxurious compartment, its lamps, its upholstery, the train's lazy swiftness and the station lights rushing past. These are itemized in my memory ; the

words are not. Perhaps the other man's recollection might have focused the words and neglected the train.

Or I try to remember an emotionally vivid conversation, in which the issues were very important for both of us. I easily recall about six points, and then am aware that what has actually arisen in consciousness is a visual image of notes which I made very carefully some hours after the interview, and referring only to the gist of the words used. I visualize the restaurant where the conversation took place over lunch, and the teashop where the notes were subsequently made.

Perhaps this unexciting account of mental workings may stimulate some one with good verbal imagery to contribute a record which can be compared with mine. I am prepared to believe that many verbalizers may report conversations more correctly than I can ; it would not take them long !

One should add that memories of conversation need not be carried by concrete images, whether visual, auditory, or audito-motor, but may be recollections of its substance ; awareness of what it was about. But it is just here that the abstracting powers of different types of person, e.g. the sentimentalist, the hard-bitten lawyer, the copy-hunting journalist, and the fastidious novelist would be used differently upon the same conversation.

Up to this point our subject has been the fidelity with which a conversation can be reproduced, and mental factors which increase or decrease such faithfulness. We shall return to this theme, but will now side-step for a few pages to consider conversations which never took

place. There are, of course, many examples in literature. For the psychologist's purposes, however, imaginary conversations written by living persons who may be willing to answer his questions are the only satisfactory material. I am fortunate, for two well-known novelists have given me some account of their ability in this direction.

When reading Miss Ann Bridge's *Peking Picnic*, I was struck by her success in making a Cambridge man talk in a way which seemed characteristic of many members of that university. (Those who feel inclined to protest are reminded that onlookers may hear most of the game.) On my writing to inquire if she wrote conversation easily, and to ask for details of the way she worked, she kindly replied :

> " When I am thinking out a conversation in a book, I hear—I have to hear, or I can't write it—the very tones in which each person speaks. I hear that, much more than I see their faces ; and unless I can get the sort of music of the voice right in my head, in relation to the words and also to the whole personality of the character, I have to reject that sentence and find another. When I am recalling an actual remembered conversation it is the same—only then I usually see the person too, striding about or peering through pince-nez or whatever it is. But for the purpose of writing a conversation, I find it is the voice alone that I go for, or rather I should say that *comes* ; I may put in a gesture or something to help out, but that is, so to speak, a separate process, and much more deliberate—I often leave it till afterwards ; then when the conversation is written I re-read it, and as I hear it in my head I *look* at the people, and watch what they are doing and how they appear as they speak—and out of a whole series of expressions or gestures, choose one or two which seem the most significant and stick them in.

" I refer all the time to writing, because it is the business of writing which has really made me aware of how I do use my stored-up memories. One's mind is like a cupboard which shuts of itself with an automatic catch ; pictures and sound-records are shoved into it almost unconsciously, stored away and little referred to—it is only when one finds that one can take them out, arrange them and sell them, that one begins to bother much about the key. And since I have begun to write, and to draw consciously on my store of remembered things, I have learned a lot about the technique of recalling them."

It is interesting to note that Miss Bridge visualizes while the imagined conversation is re-read.

Mr. J. B. Priestley wrote in answer to my inquiry :

" I am not myself a strong visualizer (in the narrower sense), but I have a remarkable aural memory and imagination, and when I am writing dialogue I hear each speaker using his own particular tone of voice. When people complain that Shaw's characters seem to be all alike, it is the fact that these characters tend to speak in the same rhythm that influences them, for actually Shaw's characters are presented as being widely different types."

· The line separating reproductive from creative imagination is probably as hard to draw here as anywhere else in the realm of memory. Many people, in relating an amusing conversation which they once heard, mercifully omit details which do not contribute to the fun, and possibly add others which do. Such artistry may increase their popularity, but not their value as witnesses. This brings us to the subject of the *testimony* of conversation, *i.e.* deliberate report by a person who is assumed to be trying his hardest to tell the truth.

The pioneer work on testimony is rightly credited to the late Professor William Stern, whose *Beiträge zur Psychologie der Aussage* (Contributions to the Psychology of Testimony) is a psychological classic. At the moment, however, work on testimony in general appears to be almost at a standstill, and there has never been much investigation into testimony for *conversation*, dealing with controversial matters which provoke emotional excitement in both speakers and listeners.

An exception is the work of Amtsrichter Dr. Boden of Hamburg in 1914. He used dialogues, which were read to the listeners by actors. One dialogue was between a prospective renter of a house, the present tenant, and the wife of the landlord ; another (in which the subjects were supposed to be apprentices overhearing the conversation) took place between the proprietor of a delicatessen shop and a traveller trying to overcome the proprietor's refusal to raise his prices by suggesting a dubious compromise.

Our own problems may conveniently be stated in question form. When conversation has been reported, either orally or in writing, how often have *the identical words used by the speakers* formed the material ? In cases where they have not, little scientific value can be attached to such a " record," for the reporter may occasionally have chosen words which, though not the actual ones, seemed to him synonymous with those spoken by the original conversers. Yet, as any educated individual whose literary sense has not been blunted by cross-word puzzles will agree, there are few real synonyms—in the

English language at any rate. A study of Roget's *Thesaurus* merely deepens this impression. It has been suggested to me by Professor F. C. Bartlett that the meaning of many a word may be more clear-cut to a visualizer, because accompanied by a visual image, than to a verbalizer, and the visualizer complains that the word which " obviously " fits the cross-word puzzle, and is afterwards proclaimed by the Editor to be " right," is often far from a true synonym. Possibly, therefore, the above scepticism about many so-called " records " of conversation may appear more serious to readers with one type of imagery than it does to others.[1] Yet the question of fidelity is especially important in testimony concerning words, and more significant than when the subject-matter is visual. To take an example from to-day's news ; all witnesses might testify that an orator's shirt was of a conventionally labelled hue, but whether, at a certain moment, he said Rebels, Right-wing, Militarists, or Monarchists, to indicate one side in the Spanish struggle,[2] and Government troops, Popular Front, Left-wing, Socialists, Communists, or " Reds," to denote the other, might be important in any legal action brought by or against him.

Such comments, not intended to be destructive, may be applicable even to the careful records of conversation made by Dr. Susan S. Isaacs, Professor David and Dr. Rosa Katz, and Professor J. Piaget, unless these

[1] Pear, T. H., " Mental Imagery and Style in Writing," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, iv., p. 453.

[2] This was written on July 31, 1936.

psychologists all possess reliable verbal memories. This is not to suggest that they do not, but to emphasize the desirability of discovering the mental peculiarities of psychological reporters.

In the above-mentioned writings, the conversations recorded were seldom likely to arouse emotions due to strong sentiments or complexes. Without further evidence, however, one cannot say the same of all recorded conversations. Sir Arnold Wilson in *Walks and Talks* writes : " All the characters and conversation herein recorded are real, none are imaginary. . . . My aim is to present a faithful, though of course inevitably superficial impression."

Almost without exception these conversations appear in *oratio recta*, inside inverted commas. Consequently, if by " a faithful impression " the author meant a faithful record, these pages would be of inestimable value to the psychologist. Perhaps the significance of this difference did not occur to Sir Arnold. Yet it is only fair to note that the first ten conversations which he has chosen to report concern matters which are debatable to many English readers and, presumably, to the author himself. These are : India ; The Desirability of More Births in England ; Sexual Promiscuity ; A Police Constable's Treatment of an Itinerant Knife-grinder ; The House of Lords ; A Boxer's Financial Dependence upon a Jew ; Reduced Speed for Motorists ; Youth Charged with Sexual Illegal Offence ; Council Houses ; " Self-sacrifice . . . the Lesson of Italy and Germany."

The question therefore arises : Can the actual words of

any conversation about such exciting subjects be reported
faithfully unless the words were actually set down at the
time ? To this, presumably, there is one answer : Yes,
if the reporter's memory for actual words, and not
merely for their meanings, is not only perfect in ordinary
circumstances, but is also proof against the disturbing
influences of emotion, prejudice, mental censorship,
selection of material with regard for presentability,
leanings towards dramatic elaboration, and artistic or
literary reluctance to present an incomplete story ; a
matter of special interest to *Gestalt* psychologists.

In the present chapter the forensic aspect of the subject,
serious as it may be, will be held apart from and regarded
as subordinate to the purely psychological point of view.
We are concerned here with the degree of correspond-
ence of the testimony with the facts, and the reasons for
divergences.

How far has previous *experiment* contributed to our
knowledge of this particular section of the subject of
testimony ? Dictated matter has been used by G. M.
Whipple, Ll. Wynn Jones, and Luetgebrune. The virtues
of these investigations are, however, partly offset by one
defect ; dictated material usually lacks vividness, vivacity,
and the unexpectedness of the give-and-take between
two minds. If, for instance, a conversation heard in a
stage performance of Shaw's *Pygmalion*, Schnitzler's
Anatol, or Noel Coward's *Private Lives* be compared with
a passage read in the laboratory, it is clear that these are
entirely different social situations for the listener, since in
the laboratory reading, the factors of emotion, rapid

changes of attention, and excitement are minimized or even absent. One should remember, too, that stage conversations seldom resemble the real thing ; and yet a prolonged study of the " real thing " seems obviously desirable, since people seek real conversations so avidly that one can scarcely regard them as uniformly dull.

Two articles in the *Archiv für die gesamte Psychologie* bear upon this subject : Rechtsanwalt Dr. Luetgebrune's " Parteifunktionär und Zeuge " and Professor Karl Marbe's comment upon it. The first paper is an interesting commentary, by a legal writer with psychological interests, upon a pacifist speech made at a German war memorial. The high party-feeling of the spectators (two processions, holding different views towards war, had converged) made it unlikely that any one could have reported correctly what was actually said. There was (to quote the characteristically detached summary of *Psychological Abstracts*) " a misunderstanding of phrasing due to emotional tension, accompanied by corresponding suggestibility towards certain ideas."

Marbe's article briefly reports an experiment carried out upon nineteen subjects by Maria Schorn. She read, " over a house-telephone which functioned very well," a political speech. The subjects were told that it was part of a festival speech from the Socialist journal *Vorwärts*. They were shown a copy of this journal, with the remark, " You know that *Vorwärts* is a Socialist paper," and were instructed to note carefully what was read on the telephone. After this they had to write down what they had heard—a spontaneous report or " narrative."

The whole text might conceivably have been taken from *Vorwärts* except for the sentence, " Die Republik hat solche Schönrednerei grossgezogen," which directly contradicted the sense of the rest of the speech. Instead of " Die Republik " two subjects wrote, (1) " Die Monarchie " ; three, instead of " wir lassen die Monarchie " wrote, (2) " Wir hassen die Monarchie."

These two errors were then made the basis of " catch questions," which were given to subjects who had not made these mistakes. They were asked : " Did the phrases (1) and (2), quoted above, stand at the beginning, the middle, or the end of the text ? " Twelve subjects gave (1) and ten subjects gave (2) a definite position in the speech. Of the subjects who said that they did not remember (1), or did not know which part of the text it occupied, none noticed that its sense was contradictory to the rest of the speech. Concerning (2), two subjects said the sentence was never read, and four that they could not remember it. A number of sentences were recalled which harmonized or were compatible with the sense of social democracy, but were quite foreign to the text as read.

These preliminary investigations suggest questions which have been discussed very rarely, *e.g.* Do any verbatim records exist of psychoanalytic free association which lasted many hours ? If so, how were they taken down ? If by a stenographer, visible to the speaker, could the words recorded have been the result of *free* association ? If words are merely written down, however faithfully, they can give their reader little idea of

the important characteristics of spoken words when heard by any one familiar with the language—characteristics such as the relative duration of the words and phrases, the intonation and speech-melody. One's judgment of these, when hearing speech, often leads to the impression that the speaker is showing doubt, indecision, sincerity, or the reverse — eagerness or vivacity. No unmarked manuscript can render these characteristics to the reader.

If dictaphone or gramophone records of psychoanalysis exist, and if, while making them, the speaker was continually aware of the necessity of speaking clearly and articulately, was he associating freely ? At a time when I made dictaphone records of free association in the analysis of dreams, I had been using the dictaphone habitually for long periods and with considerable ease, so that I almost forgot its presence when speaking, though probably one always pays special attention to articulation when using the dictaphone. This ease, however, is absent when the dictaphone is used without long practice. When making gramophone records, on account of the expensive material (until recently) and the annoyance of making a bad record, there is a tendency to be extremely careful in speaking. With improved methods of cheap and convenient reproduction these difficulties may vanish. If there are any blattnerphone records (made electrically on steel tape) of psychoanalysis, they are unlikely to be long or numerous because of their great expense. If the analyst writes down the free associations from memory after the patient has

gone, have they not then suffered the double censorship of his own mind and the patient's? To ask these questions is to register a doubt whether any records yet exist which would serve as satisfactory scientific evidence for the claims of psychoanalysis.

An attempt experimentally to investigate the testimony of conversation was made in 1936 by Ruth H. Manson (Mrs. Humphrey Fairclough) and the present writer.[1] The procedure resembles that of our predecessors in that Stern's and Whipple's methods of treating the data were employed, but differs from it in that the material for testimony was a specially written conversation recorded on the gramophone.

It may be useful to summarize the advantages and disadvantages of using, for our special purpose, a gramophone record. Supposing that it were perfect (and the one finally chosen was far from that):

(1) It presents, at any desired time, not soliloquy, but conversation, and unrecorded conversation is difficult to procure without notice.

· (2) A subject which interests most ordinary people can be chosen.

(3) It can involve a real clash of opinions, and tend to draw most listeners into its mental arena. Affective colouring can be deliberately provoked, though it may not be similar for all listeners.

(4) It can be reproduced, in approximately the same

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[1] "The Testimony of Conversation," *British Journal of Psychology*, 1937, 27, pp. 277–91. Part of the present chapter has been taken from this article.

conditions, for many people at different times and in different places.

(5) If desirable, it can be broadcast, thus making possible the use of very large groups.

(6) Its success can be judged by many people, expert or otherwise, at different times. Its script could be written and recorded by experts.

Disadvantages are :

(1) The speakers are not seen. The conversation on the radio, very common nowadays, is of this type, and, presumably, overheard conversations between unseen persons (*e.g.* " tapped " conversations on the telephone) may be important from the legal standpoint.

(2) Some people, not really hard of hearing, experience difficulty in understanding " mechanical " speech. This will be lessened by improving the speakers' technique, and methods of recording and reproducing. It should be added, however, that some hearers display affective stupidity towards gramophone reproduction.

(3) Real conversation is usually " untidy " ; the speakers overlap, interrupt, and rapidly change their pace. Some judges of the record used in this experiment said that it was too " tidy " and too regular in the exchange of opinions. Others disagreed, pointing out that many actual conversations are relatively " tidy " and regular in form. (There were no interruptions in the record used.)

(4) A rehearsed conversation with its sustained argument is often too logical to be real. (It is, of course, easy to write an illogical conversation.)

The general aim in making the record was to produce a conversation which (*a*) can be understood by most people ; (*b*) while not exceptionally exciting, concerns a subject of popular interest ; (*c*) is unobtrusively filled with ideas and arguments which lend themselves to numerical recording ; (*d*) contains some expressions of opinion with which any one listener is likely to sympathize, and others which will probably arouse antipathy in him ; (*e*) uses, on the whole, ordinary methods of expression, but here and there a few which are unusually phrased, and might give rise to interesting misquotations ; (*f*) contains one or two " catches," *i.e.* phrases or words out of key with the rest of the conversation, which when remembered might be unconsciously distorted in order to make sense.

The conversation employed is given below :

Speakers : A (a woman), B (a man), leaving a cinema

(Waltz fades down)

   B. Well, that's over ; what about a cup of tea ?

   A. Good idea.   Didn't you enjoy it ?

   B. Not terribly.

   A. Don't you like the pictures ?

   B. I used to, when they didn't talk and had real music. Nowadays, after half an hour, I get bored—I'm sorry.

   A. Why ?   You can't be normal.

   B (interrupts). Oh, I say !

   A. Ordinary, I mean, I beg your pardon ; look at the hundreds of people queuing up outside the cinemas—

   B. Yes, look at them—have you ever ?

   A. Don't be silly, I'm there sometimes.

   B. Ah well, that does alter things a bit.   But don't you think

those who queue up just take what's given them on the screen, along with the really important things :

A. What are they ?

B. Warmth, comfortable seats, darkness, and a complete get-away from the day's washing, the account-books, the dull streets, the crowded home—

A. Don't you ever try to escape from *your* work ?

B. Yes, of course, and the pictures offer a short way. But after a few minutes I often find them too dull to distract me. Don't you ?

A. Sometimes—but I never go to the pictures unless I want to see some particular film. I hate the American voice, and so they are nearly all British films that I see.

B. Aren't you being a bit narrow-minded ?

A. No, I'm not ; to me the average American film-actor's voice sounds hideous.

B. So really there's something to be said for the old silent films after all.

A. Well, at least they couldn't utter some of the noises we hear nowadays—on the other hand they couldn't give you Elisabeth Bergner, Seymour Hicks, or Charlie Chaplin [1], or—

B. —the all-talking, all-singing, all-dancing atrocities.

A. I agree with you there, but you needn't go to see them. What about Mickey Mouse and the News Reels—and some of the " shorts," so grimly labelled " educational " ; surely you can't be bored with those ?

B. No, I like them. What about the music ? Do you like canned music and the cinema-organ ?

A. Well, it may be canned, but it's better than the old tinkling pianos or the local orchestra with " effects," which supported the silent films. As for musical settings ; did you see *Sanders of the River* or *Bulldog Jack* ?

B. No, I didn't. Some of the films I've seen lately have been

[1] The last name was inserted to discover how many listeners would note this contradiction.

very cleverly made, but that doesn't alter the fact that they still bore *me*.

A. Well—all I can say is that either you go to the pictures too often to appreciate what you see, or too little to find out what you're missing. You must admit that the cinema gives you thrills.

B. But what kind of thrills ? Do you really get excited now at the pictures when you see and hear a revolver shot off, or a car hit a lamp-post ?

A. Yes, I do, if the thing is well done, that is. I know there are a lot of second-rate dramas in celluloid, but these are the films I don't queue up for.

B. Even then, you make the queue only one less. Why do so many thousands go to the pictures regardless of the film— I still hold that it is the warmth, and all those things I mentioned, which attract them.

A. Maybe you're right—I must say I like to enjoy the film from a comfortable warm seat when I've taken so much care to choose it. Those who aren't so particular would probably get infinitely more enjoyment from their visit to the pictures than you or I.

B. Well, I hope they do, I'm afraid I shall never be a film fan. Look at " fan " ! What a mess they're making of the language too !

A. Well, we can't discuss that now. Here's our bus.

The drift of the conversation would not be predictable by a lazy listener, since in England at that time (1934) objections to " talkies " and to American voices were apt to go together.

(It is hoped that American readers will not be pained by the exploitation of a prejudice current at that time. The topic was included because it aroused interest, and for that reason only.)

Three different types of listener took part in the

experiment ; university undergraduates, students at a teachers' training college, and members of classes of the Workers' Educational Association. Paper and pencils were given out, and the instructions (read by the experimenter from a typewritten sheet) were :

"We are interested to know *what* you can remember of a conversation, immediately after hearing it. Obviously, the best conversation would be a real one, but by using a gramophone record we have the chance of comparing your answer with others. It is not a very good record, and would you very kindly listen as if you were overhearing a conversation on the radio, or in circumstances where hearing is a little difficult ? If the record stops suddenly, try not to laugh, and at any moment when I say ' Now ! ' please write down all you can remember of the conversation." (This was inserted so that if the record broke down, the conversation up to that point could be reported.)

"It is supposed to be between two people coming out of a cinema, and begins with some rather bad cinema music. Don't listen critically, either to the quality of the sounds made or to the conversation. There are two speakers, a man and a woman.

"Immediately I say ' Now ! ' write down everything you can of the conversation you have heard. Please look at the blackboard for further instructions."

While the subjects were writing their reports, the instructions were put on the blackboard. They were :

"Underline every phrase of which you are absolutely certain ;

e.g. ⎰ The dog was ⎱ is two phrases."
⎱ in the street ⎰

The typescript from which the record had been made was divided up into its component items. This was done by separating the text into " ideas," or what appeared

to be distinct thought-entities, whether conveyed in a whole sentence or in one word. For instance, the sentence, " Aren't you being a bit narrow-minded ? " was taken as one item, since one idea was conveyed. " Warmth, comfortable seats, darkness, and a complete get-away from the day's washing " counted as five ideas.

The separation of items was carried out on the same plan. The judgments were arbitrary, but the system lent itself to comparable results which could be fairly checked and easily counted. Word-for-word analysis was contemplated, but in a record of this length was found to be well-nigh impossible.

There was a total of 132 items. Each report was divided similarly. The totals were counted, also the total number of items which were underlined as subjectively certain. Each was compared with the original, and the items reported were put into three categories, *right, synonymous* (or making fair sense), and *wrong*. Of the number underlined as certain, there were two categories, right and wrong. The margin of error allowed in each item recorded as correct was confined to prepositions or conjunctions which did not essentially alter the sense ; *e.g.* " Well, that's over now," instead of " Well, that's over." The correct items were marked with a tick (check), and those definitely incorrect with a cross. The unmarked items were counted as those which conveyed the right gist or trend, synonymous with or making fair sense out of the original material. Correct items grossly out of place in the logical sequence of the argument were counted wrong, as were those

attributed to the wrong speaker. The number of crosses and ticks gave the number of right and wrong items, and the total, minus these, gave the amount of gist.

The figures obtained for each script were tabulated, and from the results each individual's reliability and accuracy of report, and subjective assurance, were calculated. The methods for finding these were taken from G. M. Whipple's *Manual of Mental and Physical Tests*, and can also be seen in the *British Journal of Psychology* article quoted on page 99.

The number of listeners' answers used was 91. Here one can only indicate the suggestiveness of some results. The qualitative nature of the answers is interesting. Though no other figures with which they can be compared are available, it would seem that the general sense of the conversation is reported with little accuracy. Many people have not caught the thread of the argument, such as it is, at all, and many have reversed entirely the opinions given in the record. Others have recollected phrases here and there, stringing them on a thread of their own manufacture. The university students often use—sometimes inappropriately—sophisticated " synonyms " for the ordinary words deliberately chosen and actually spoken.

The items which were reported wrongly repay examination, *e.g.* cups of coffee instead of tea, " people with big mouths making crude noises," " silly high-brow " instead of " local " orchestras, may represent the elaboration in increasing degree.

The range seems surprisingly small, the maximum

being 81 and the minimum 10 items, out of a possible 132. One may perhaps surmise that part of the material was too "abstract" and difficult for some subjects to remember. Yet it contains many concrete items.

A few details about the listeners' "subjective assurance" as compared with their objective accuracy may be of interest. Members of the Workers' Educational Association class were the most assured of the accuracy of their recall, and the most reliable in their subjective assurance. The greater average age of this group may have been a factor in this result. The training college group came second in respect of subjective assurance, but was the least reliable. The university undergraduates were least assured, but were fairly reliable. This last result may be accounted for by the fact that this particular group was, to a certain extent, psychologically trained, and, therefore, perhaps more liable to regard the experiment objectively and impersonally. Greater knowledge of their mental limitations may have tended to reduce their subjective assurance.

It should be emphasized that the numbers in the groups are small ; 32 university undergraduates, 15 W.E.A., members, and 44 training college students, The above findings and the following deductions are therefore merely suggestive.

Objective accuracy is not necessarily proportional to subjective certainty. This is shown by the low correlations ; 0.325, with Probable Error 0.09, for Group A, and 0.484, with P.E. 0.07, for Group C.

The undergraduates, on the whole, recalled the

skeleton of the argument and elaborated it more or less correctly. The W.E.A. students gave less elaboration and relatively few of the points made by the conversers, but on the whole were more accurate. The training college students presented relatively disjointed argument with a great deal of elaboration. Out of the 91 listeners, 40 reported more correct than incorrect material.

Since before working upon the 91 scripts we had eliminated those from listeners who could not hear well, the gross amount of inaccuracy due to inaudibility is perhaps not great. Inaccuracy is probably due to individual differences of remembering as well as to environmental factors of upbringing and education. Yet it should be remembered that the subject of this conversation interests almost all social classes ; it introduced widely-known names and film titles, and contained no difficult words. It was certainly simpler than many conversations which form the subject of disputes in the law courts.

The necessity of first recalling and then writing down the words of the conversation introduced several variable factors. Whatever their degree of education, some people like and others dislike expressing themselves in writing. To one who writes easily and habitually, the almost silent transference to paper of one's thoughts may be easy and pleasant ; there are others for whom the effort of pen-pushing obstructs thinking. For such people, dictation to a stenographer may meet this difficulty ; yet both the muscular actions and the sounds of speaking might

interfere with the auditory imagery or audito-motor activity necessary for recall of the actual words.

The extent to which individual differences of mental make-up may complicate this problem seems considerable. Whether the listeners' variability of performance and their general " poor " recall is largely due to the experimental procedure, or whether such a degree of error exists in most attempts to recall any everyday conversation can be settled only by further inquiry.

In view of its forensic significance, the effect upon the testimony of conversation of requiring evidence to be given on oath should be examined in detail with special reference to the mental make-up of the witnesses. Might a relatively uneducated person occasionally give a more faithful account of the actual words used, provided they were understood, than a sophisticated listener, accustomed to giving what he might term the essence of a conversation, disregarding its details ?

Analogies are not always safe ; but if, let us suppose, a trained anthropologist and a simple-minded person interested in modern fashions were to describe the appearance of a well-dressed woman whom they had seen for a moment, the latter account, though less interesting scientifically, might be more useful to the police. Perhaps growing knowledge of so-called synonyms in a language may make one increasingly uninterested in reproducing the actual words one hears. If so, the educated witness might be positively unhelpful. " I understood that Mr. A had not given complete satisfaction " might be a sophisticated summary of a conversation which was, in fact, interlarded

with emotionally toned, even libellous statements. In ordinary circumstances we might thank the summarizer for kindly shielding us from having to listen to what A and B actually said—yet this act would have distorted his evidence.

Some interesting problems in a wide field promise, if investigated, valuable data for theory and practice. A few of them are :

(1) To what extent does success in reporting conversation faithfully depend upon the reporter's predominant type of imagery ?

(2) The subject of remembered conversation would seem to lend itelf to investigation under the four headings of Impression, Retention, Recall, and Recognition. The influence upon all these processes of the conversation's emotional colouring should be investigated, particularly the effect of the listener's strong agreement or disagreement with the opinions expressed.

(3) The effect upon testimony of the reporter's having taken a prominent part in the conversation, or having merely formed one of an audience, should be closely investigated.

(4) The method of recording the testimony, *e.g.* speaking to a person who is not making notes, dictating to a stenographer or stenotypist, dictaphoning, speaking naturally near a steel-tape or film recording apparatus, or speaking with care when making a gramophone record, writing, or typing, must alter the testimony ; to say nothing of the effect of the interrogatory. A wide field of investigation exists here.

(5) In view of its legal significance, the effect upon testimony of requiring evidence concerning conversation to be given on oath should be examined in detail, with special reference to the mental make-up of the witness. The differences between testimony which has been volunteered (" narrative ") and that obtained by questioning (" interrogatory " or cross-examination) have been shown in Stern's and other experiments conducted upon *seen* events to be considerable. It seems unlikely that different results would be obtained with heard conversation.

SUBJECTS OF CONVERSATION

EVEN a casual observer may be impressed by the frequency with which psychological questions evoke smiles from non-psychologists. The attitudes causing this reaction are varied; not only amusement, but disapproval or apprehension may be aroused. We often smile at the mention of matters which we wish to remain unexamined. Laughing at other people's problems, however, is not unknown even among professional thinkers. This jaundiced beginning is intended to emphasize that no psychologist need try to measure the importance of his problem by the seriousness with which people regard it.

Let us, then, ask, " What do people talk about?" " When?" " Where?" " To whom?" An investigator seldom poses a question which is not based upon some hypothesis. Accordingly, we may inquire, " What beliefs, justified or not, are held about preferred themes of conversation?"

Almost on the borderline between non-infringement of taboo and positive good taste is a usage which I believe is fairly common. Cultured, educated, and sophisticated people talk more about ideas and less about persons;

simple people talk chiefly about persons and things. The distinction made here is not, of course, between " upper " and " lower " social classes.

Different choices of subject are influenced not only by the place and the time, but by the physical and social setting of the conversation : whether the meeting-place belongs to one of the participants or is neutral ground ; whether tobacco, drink, or food (symbols of ascending intimacy) have been offered, accepted, or declined ; whether the conversers regard their acquaintance as likely to be brief or long, renewable or not. The unique, rapidly growing friendship attained during short ocean voyages may even owe something to the anticipation that it is not renewable.

Deliberate avoidance of certain subjects forms part of the technique of tact discussed in Chapter III.

Social psychologists have studied some actual conversations. At the 1929 International Congress of Psychology, I. Spilrein reported the results of analysing the ability of different kinds of Russian people to understand the laws:

> " Stenographic reports were taken of the conversation of peasants, workers and soldiers, and these were compared with the conversations of educated people. In general, uneducated people were found to use more words to say the same thing ; and an idea which could be so stated as to be understood by an educated person in five words might require ten to be understood by the uneducated. The conversation of the educated was also richer in nouns. Laws were rewritten in view of these findings, by substituting verbs for nouns in many cases, and by presenting the ideas in less condensed form—a single sentence should not contain too many ideas. Experimental results appear to

indicate that the intelligibility of the laws was thus enormously increased." [1]

One point should be noted, however ; in certain circumstances in our own country the speech of relatively uneducated persons is complicated, and that of sophisticated people simple. A poorly educated man who has read widely may use polysyllables as a means of self-assertion or over-compensation.

" Sampling methods " have been applied to the study of conversation.

" H. T. Moore made a record of conversations heard on Broadway, New York, as he walked through the theatre district each evening. He classified conversations as ' man to man,' ' woman to woman,' and ' man to woman,' and within each of these three groups assigned each conversation to a category based upon the chief topic with which the fragment of conversation dealt. Here he found a preponderance of discussion of clothes and of social affairs among women, and of money and business affairs among men ; in general, the ' man to woman ' conversations showed not so much a mixture of the two sets of interests as a tendency for the women to adapt themselves to the subjects of chief interest to the men.

" A similar study was carried out by M. H. Landis and H. E. Burtt at Columbus, Ohio. The college campus, street cars, hotel lobbies, barber shops, churches, and other public places were studied ; the sampling therefore represents a much greater range of situations than that used by Moore. Nearly five hundred conversations were classified under such captions as ' business and money,' ' clothes and decoration,' ' sports,' ' college work,' ' health,' etc. The sex differences are in marked

agreement with those found by Moore. The greater interest of women in persons, long ago emphasized by Thorndike, is apparent in the present data : 37 per cent. of the women's conversations are about persons, but only 16 per cent. of the men's. Landis and Burtt also classified individuals into such groups as 'business' people, 'industrial workers,' 'students.' The differences are in the expected direction, but are perhaps more striking than would be anticipated ; for example, business people talk about business and money in 70 per cent. of the conversations overheard ; industrial workers in only 43 per cent., students in only 9 per cent.

"An interesting comparison with the American figures is offered by C. Landis, who listened to conversations in Oxford and Regent Streets in London. Two hundred fragments of conversation were classified in the three categories recognized by Moore, with data which in general approximate the American figures. Business, however, did not predominate quite so heavily. Landis reports, moreover, that in the 'man to woman' conversations (76 cases), the English man in general tends to adapt his conversation to the interests of the woman, while the American woman adapts her conversation to the interest of the man. The comparability of the American and English groups is of course not proved, and it is only where the three studies just mentioned tend to agree that we feel sure the data are anything more than suggestive." [1]

This assertion that the American woman—presumably of a particular class—tends to adapt her conversation to the man's interests, and that an opposite tendency exists in London, if generally true, is interesting. One would like to know the representative age of the American woman referred to, since the "finishing touches" given to the American débutante have been said to include

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[1] This summary is from Murphy, G. and L. B., *op. cit.*, pp. 501-2.

instruction in the art of putting a man at his ease. When she reaches later life, does she adapt her conversation to men so readily? Perhaps English middle-class men conform ostensibly to a tacit understanding that women usually direct " *mixed* " conversation, though here again qualifications about age might be made. Children's talk and conversations are discussed in Chapter VII.

In England, Dr. S. Wyatt, L. Frost, and F. G. L. Stock, in order to study the nature and causes of the reactions of different individuals to various types and conditions of work, applied close and continuous observation to a small group of girls employed in controlled conditions for a total period of fifty-four weeks, " The attitude of the workers after the first few days was indistinguishable from that of an ordinary factory group towards the regular overlooker." Though the relation of talking to the conditions of work was only one of the problems which interested the investigators, it was easy, since the workers talked freely, to make a fairly complete record of the topics discussed. The authors write :

" A representative sample taken from the first twelve weeks (of piece-rate) is given below :

Subject	Frequency
1. The opposite sex	42
2. Films and film stars	27
3. Local gossip and scandal	14
4. Suicides, murders, and accidents	10
5. Local events	11
6. Conditions of work (features disliked)	32
,, ,, (features liked)	5

7. Outside activities—Rambles	.	.	.	.	8 ⎫
Dirt track racing	.	.	.	.	12 ⎪
Rugby football	.	.	.	.	2 ⎪
Girl Guides	.	.	.	.	16 ⎪
Swimming	.	.	.	.	5 ⎬ 72
Dancing	.	.	.	.	8 ⎪
Gardening	.	.	.	.	6 ⎪
Holidays	.	.	.	.	8 ⎪
Home Life	.	.	.	.	7 ⎭
8. Personal—Photographs	.	.	.	.	7 ⎫
Clothes	.	.	.	.	12 ⎪ 33
Food	.	.	.	.	5 ⎪
Money	.	.	.	.	9 ⎭

The results speak for themselves, but attention may be directed to the frequent references to features of the work which were disliked. Repetitive workers have plenty of time for thought, and it is not surprising that difficulties and annoyances should occupy a prominent place in their minds. The individual is constantly reminded of the unpleasant features of work, and the mind tends to dwell on these aspects of the industrial situation. As a result, they become greatly exaggerated and form a subtle but developing background of discontent which reduces pleasure and interest in work.

It will also be noticed that the most popular subject of conversation connected with outside activities was the Girl Guide movement, presumably because several of the workers were members of a troop organized by the firm. The interest in this movement evidently provided food for thought during work, and the results illustrate an important effect of social activities associated with factory life.

The subjects of conversation have interested students of mass-observation. At the English Coronation in 1937, for example, many records of conversation were made.[1] " Suggestions " (apparently not definite instructions) which " may be of assistance " to those taking notes of conversation were given (p. 351) to observers for another date.

> " If any speeches are given as direct speech (*i.e.* in inverted commas), it should be stated if shorthand was used. If not, how long after the conversation took place it was recorded. (*N.B.* Direct speech is very often incorrectly remembered in detail, although the gist may be accurate.) In conversation, give status of speaker. If you mention the status of a speaker, *e.g.* business man, or ' two young matrons,' upper middle class, say how you judged it, *e.g.* by clothes, by accent, by knowledge of the individual, or how."

Since it seems impossible to ascertain how far these suggestions were followed, it is difficult to judge the scientific value of the data recorded in this volume.

In a subsequent publication, however, Mr. Harrisson's special observers have paid more attention to their methods of obtaining data. I am indebted to him (September 1938) for information concerning some of the material which was written up recently in *Britain by Mass-Observation*. These observations, he writes, were all made from a special point of view, and were not primarily intended as an actual study of talks.

The main methods used were verbatim transcription

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[1] (Ed. by) Humphrey Jennings and Charles Madge, *May the Twelfth, Mass-Observation Day-Surveys*. 1937. London. (Faber.) See especially pp. 146, 149, 178, 191, 225, 233, 244, 259, 289, 308, 313.

on the spot (the procedure being unnoticed by the speakers) and a system of scoring conversations under their topics.

The second method has certain disadvantages from a psychologist's standpoint, since there might often be more than one opinion as to the exact subject of any conversation heard by a non-participant. But some conversations which the observers took down must have been brief, and so, perhaps, this objection is less serious than it might be when a longer exchange of views is being studied.

Mr. Harrisson's views are given below :

> " In the present circumstances these results must not be taken as in any way conclusive, general, or very satisfactory, but only as one better than crude generalization of impressions. For the moment we can only see what sorts of things frequently come up, and distinguish the top fifteen as prominent themes. Probably on any method of collecting and classifying the material, these would tend in some form to come out higher than the bottom fifteen. Again, some of the points are topics of full conversations, others are simply exclamations or noises. There comparison in percentages is most distinctly artificial ; at the same time it is helpful for comparison.
>
> " Women are notably ahead in discussing male friends, amusements, clothes, dancing, lodgings ; women friends rather less than male friends.
>
> " Special ' mapped surveys ' were carried out whenever there was an important political event which will give us a measure of public response. Several such crises were measured in Worktown, here in brief are two.

" The Eden Crisis

" On February 21, 1938, headlines everywhere proclaimed the

resignation of Mr. Anthony Eden from his Cabinet post as Foreign Minister. The incident made a visible ripple on the tongues of the town. Analysis of 15,000 conversations recorded in Worktown has established that on an ordinary day only 0.3 per cent. of the conversations are about politics ; but on February 21, this rose to 4 per cent. Not all of these were about Eden, for a general happening of interest in political topics was noticed as well as an even more marked heightening of interest in amusement, a feature noticeable in this and subsequent crises.

"The general opinion of those engaged in a snap survey as to the most noteworthy thing about the conversations was that those taking part were all middle-aged men."

The Anschluss

On Saturday, March 13, 1938, Hitler marched into Austria, and this time the effect on Worktown was somewhat more noticeable. In conversations, politics reached a record of 6 per cent. on the Monday. Three hundred and ten conversations were immediately recorded at random. If the subject " Friend " be taken at 100, the topics of these conversations assume the following relative proportions :

Friend . . 100	Politics and news .	38
Weather . . 53	Money . . .	20
Place . . . 44	Food . . .	18
Time . . 42	Children . . .	14
Job . . . 41	Health . . .	14
Clothes . . 35	Enemy . . .	4

Britain by Mass-Observation appears just as the present book is finished, too late for expressing any considered opinion of the work of these pioneers. In Chapter V.—

"Remembering Conversation"—I suggest the requirements which scientific record of conversation should satisfy. It is impossible to ascertain from *Britain by Mass Observation* how far such requirements are met by Mr. Harrisson's observers. Further reports on the subject must be awaited.

CHAPTER VII

CHILDREN'S CONVERSATIONS

It is not easy to fix any point in a child's life at which he can be said to converse with an adult and not merely to exchange almost meaningless noises. If you snap your fingers or whistle a high note near a baby of four months, he may, if such actions succeed in attracting his attention, smile and make inarticulate sounds. What causes the smile, and whether the sound is a chuckle or merely a hiccough, are matters often briskly debated. Yet this "inter-subjective" intercourse must be the beginning of conversation.

Genuine conversation may occur even when the words spoken by the participants are numerically disproportionate. One small child, when rejecting something offered to her, used to say, "Any !", *i.e.* "Not any !" One day, in an angry mood, she sat with her back against the wainscot, snapping "Any" at proposals from all comers. Aunt Katharine arrived. Approaching the little Diogenes with a smile, she made an elegantly ingratiating speech, listened to with respect. The answer was "Any Catty !" This is a perfect conversation.

Until recently, little attempt had been made to study scientifically conversations between and with children. Even now attention has been focused rather upon the

matter than upon the manner of the word-exchange. There is room for much more detailed study of the different patterns of conversation when at least one of the speakers is immature.

Extensive work in this direction has been done by Professor Jean Piaget. In *The Language and Thought of the Child* he attempts to answer the question, " What are the needs which the child tends to satisfy when he talks ? " His results are based upon careful observations of the language of various children between the ages of 3 and 11 at the Maison des Petits de l'Institut Rousseau, Geneva. In *The Child's Conception of the World* he asks whether, like ourselves, the child believes in a real world distinct from the various fictions of his play and imagination, and whether he offers an original type of causal explanation of them. This book is interesting because of its consideration of methods of child investigation. Tests he thinks unsuitable, because they risk falsifying the results by upsetting the orientation of the child's mind ; pure observation he finds equally impracticable on account of the child's intellectual egocentrism and because of the difficulty of discerning what is play and what is genuine belief in the child. He adopts a mixed method ; that of clinical investigation. For details of this and of the concepts of egocentricity and socialization the reader must be referred to Piaget's writing.

Piaget's " clinical method " consists of sustained conversations with individual children. In using it, he developed a special control of the questions asked, and of the interpretation of the answers ; thus adapting the

technique of the psychiatric interview to the study of the minds of young children. The topics which Piaget introduced and the kind and form of the questions put to the child were based upon the results of earlier investigations in which he had gathered children's spontaneous questions and reflections. Thus an advantage is claimed for the " clinical " method in comparison with the test, since the former is said to be founded upon the child's own notions.

Piaget views the child's mental life as characterized by certain well-marked phases. The infant thinks " autistically," *i.e.* he lives in fantasy, and his " thinking " is exclusively in the service of immediate desire. There follows a long period of " egocentrism," when the child has an implicit belief in his own ideas which need no proof. His questions are usually rhetorical, not genuine inquiries. He assumes that others understand what he says without effort on his part, and that they believe as he does. Piaget believes that the conversations of a group of such children contain very few questions, orders, or adapted information. They are mostly a set of soliloquies or " collective monologues," where every one talks to himself without listening to others ; a performance which Piaget contrasts with " adapted information." There is thus no real interchange of ideas, and arguments are simply a conflict of contrary affirmations. This holds true until the age of seven or eight, when genuine verbal understanding first appears and real social life begins. Piaget says, " The adult thinks socially, even when he is alone, and the child under seven

thinks egocentrically, even in the society of others . . . there is no real social life between children of less than seven or eight years."

Dr. Susan S. Isaacs, however, urges that Piaget offers us no key to this social development. It would seem to be itself the principle of explanation ; the invocation of a principle of biological maturation of the nervous system, needing no assumption of previous psychological happenings. She herself, on the basis of the records of the embryonic social relations among her own group of little children at the Malting House School, Cambridge, believes that the process of socialization is gradual and continuous, though marked by recognizable phases, and that the " social instincts," which appear more marked at seven to eight years, have, at any rate in part, an individual history and a strictly psychological genesis. Their form is to some extent the outcome of experience, and of a highly complicated interplay of tendencies and countertendencies.

She contends that besides mere " contrary affirmations " a considerable amount of mutual correction and genuine interchange of opinion and argument went on among the Cambridge children—quite as many *genuine* arguments and exchanges of views as there would be with any group of ordinary adults. She asks pertinently, " Is not a large part of our own conversation a conglomeration of ' contrary affirmations '—when it is not merely a verbal form of herd contact ? "

The Cambridge children showed little collective monologue. Their talk almost always seemed to be

definitely *directed*. They talked *to* each other, and in the presence of others, quite rarely to themselves. She says, "I have no record of any remark of Dan's which had not a social intent, and to which a reply in some form was not looked for. . . . I have definite records of verbal monologue from two children only . . . both at a time when they were well under four years of age." She, therefore, cannot accept the view that there is any *stage of development* corresponding to the concept of monologuism, or recognize the supposed phenomena of the collective monologue in Piaget's characteristic sense.

It is natural to ask, "Did the intelligence (mental ratio) of the Geneva children and those at Cambridge differ to any great extent ? If so, could this be a factor causing the difference between their behaviour ? " The answer is Yes, and some of the difference in behaviour seems to be due to intelligence. The Cambridge children's mental ratio ranged from 114 to 166 with an everage of 131 ; Piaget's subjects averaged around 100. The social environment of the two groups differed considerably, both at school and at home. The Cambridge group varied in number from ten to twenty and in age from 2.7 to 10.5 years ; the number of the staff teaching them was two in the first two years, three in the third year, and five in the last term when these records were made. The children were from professional families ; many had highly distinguished parents. "At first we were a day-school only ; but in the second year we began to take children into residence, and in the third year about a third of them lived at the school." It is therefore certain

that the social stimulation of these children, both at school and at home, was unusual, though this lessens the comparability of the groups in respect of intelligence.

The general environment of the two groups of children and the actual conditions of observing them are therefore difficult to compare. As the Malting House School does not now exist, it is impossible to carry out the interesting experiment in which a group of Cambridge children, of intelligence and bringing-up comparable to the Geneva group, could be given the schooling characteristic of the Malting House.

Professor David and Rosa Katz began from private motives to note down, word for word, conversations which they had held with their children before "the years of naturalness" were over and before they became "ever more firmly entangled in the tragedy of civilization." The result was a book *Gespräche mit Kindern*, the greater part of which has appeared in an English translation, *Conversations with Children*.

It may puzzle the non-expert psychologist that since, as Katz puts it, speaking is by far the most important medium of social life, and conversation is the most revealing point at which it appears, there should be so little about either subject in books on psychology. The stock discussions of "language" usually smother both of them. This is partly due to the dominance in academic circles of the written and printed word, and to the general tendency of psychologists, until recently, to use only "atomistic" methods of tackling their problems. For this reason many studies of solo-speaking, excellent from

the physicist's standpoint, are difficult to utilize. Clearly, however, when investigating conversation, the only form of useful study considers the total social situation.

In the preface Professor and Frau Katz admit that the children's remarks are amusing at times, but urge that this does not preclude serious scientific investigation of them.

Katz rightly attributes to Piaget the credit for interesting psychologists and educationists in the social-psychological point of view with regard to conversation, and discusses Piaget's views. Katz reminds us that William Stern thought that the high percentage of egocentric statements in Piaget's results arose out of the special conditions in the children's home at Geneva.

Martha Muchow tested Piaget's findings at a Hamburg kindergarten, where the children formed a somewhat closer group. She found little more than a third of the remarks of five-year-old children to be egocentric.

In view of our interest in the scientific reliability of records of conversation it is important to notice the methods used by Katz and his wife. Often one of them noted the conversations in an abbreviated form while the other was talking to the children. Occasionally, while both the psychologists were engaged in a conversation, it was taken down by the nursemaid, who sat in the next room with the door open. For many of the short conversations, which were written down immediately they ended, no immediate noting was required. But Professor Katz records that his wife soon developed

surprising skill in reproducing from immediate memory the longer conversations in most accurate detail.

He observed that the remarks of their two children, even from the time when the younger was only three years old, were not predominantly egocentric when they were playing with each other. But if with strange, or less familiar children, their way of expression developed more egocentricity. He adds, "We would even go so far as to assert that the utterances of a child in the presence of its parents are only in the rarest cases egocentric."

He describes the interesting way in which the child (and, too, young people, and even adults) may initiate a conversation by making an "interrogative assertion"; a sentence the external form of which is a statement while its inner structure is a question: a "feeler," in fact. It is used "when the person concerned is desirous either of avoiding committing an error or feels that a direct question would betray too much respect. Then the tendency is to *assert*, in the hope of provoking thereby the desired response. The experienced judge of character can tell at once from the rhythm of the sentence what is taking place."

One may surmise that this technique is used by certain bluff, simple-minded adults if they have a slight feeling of inferiority. They almost expect the *vis-à-vis* to contradict, or at least to modify their statement.

Katz mentions other interesting points, *e.g.* the tension between person and person necessary for many conversations to get started. In a railway carriage one can

often observe A and B preparing to open a conversation. (How seldom, in contrast, do strangers in the modern bus speak to each other! Perhaps the fact that they face the same way discourages the casual development of intimacy.) There must also be mutual harmony between the characters; "perhaps even more important than intelligence, education, or class-level." But the causes of this harmony are often hard to discover.

D. A. McCarthy's[1] work on conversation is interesting:

> "By means of an elaborate functional analysis of samples of the running conversation of 140 children, she found it practicable to show the development of various complex forms of expression, such as the simple sentence and the complex sentence, to carry forward Piaget's idea of a functional classification of verbal behaviour in terms of the part which language plays in the child's life, and to show the relations between linguistic development on the one hand and intelligence and socio-economic status on the other. The children were so selected as to give a distribution, both social and intellectual, typical of the city from which they were drawn. In another study,[2] McCarthy analysed the proportion of egocentric responses obtained, and found only from three to six per cent. in two situations of her investigation. All but two of the children showed more egocentric responses on the playground than in the experimental situation. It seems probable, in view of these differences, that the proportion of egocentric talk varies widely with circumstances; even this, however, would hardly explain the enormous differences between McCarthy's maximum

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[1] D. A. McCarthy, *The Language Development of the Pre-School Child.* 1930.

[2] D. A. McCarthy, "A Comparison of Children's Language in Different Situations and Its Relation to Personality Traits." *J. Genet. Psychology,* 1929. Vol. xxxvi, pp. 591-93.

finding of about 6½ per cent., and Piaget's finding of 50 per cent. Probably different definition and classification account in part for this.

" Vygotsky and Luria [1] have further light to offer on this question of egocentric speech. Their experience shows that it appeared when the child was confronted with a difficult situation, and that the so-called egocentric reactions were directed toward the solution of the problem ; that is, that the child was really trying to solve the problem verbally ; or, as we say, thinking out loud. They concluded that egocentric speech had a fairly definite organic function, and that this function did not disappear, but was supplanted by internal speech, which served the same purpose.

" McCarthy's analysis has other points of interest. The reliability of her data is measured by correlating odd—with even-numbered responses. The results are amazingly consistent ; they point to the objectivity of the mode of classification as well as to the stability of the tendency toward certain kinds of responses at a given level of development. The length of verbal response increases steadily with chronological age during the interval (eighteen to fifty-four months) which is studied, and the length of response is found to correlate significantly with the intelligence-quotient as well. The characteristic differences in intellectual status in relation to paternal occupation are reflected, for example, in the consistent tendency to the lengthening of the verbal response as one proceeds from the children of unskilled labourers to those of professional people.

" McCarthy's data substantiate the frequent emphasis upon the importance of *naming* in the speech of small children ; omission of the verb is therefore a natural occurrence at this stage. Nouns, which at first play a very large part in the total speech, give place with time, especially to verbs ; conjunctions and prepositions appear late in the pre-school period. Further

[1] Vygotsky, L. S., and Luria, A. R., " The Function and Fate of Egocentric Speech." *Ninth International Congress of Psychology, Proceedings and Papers* (1929, published 1930), pp. 463–65.

analysis of language acquisition showed that adapted information, questions and answers, increase rapidly with advance in chronological age, while the emotionally toned responses show a relative decrease with age. Further evidence of the emotional factors entering into the situation is offered by the initial shyness which caused the first ten responses of each child to average shorter than the next ten responses.

" She also found that the children she observed tended to give many more emotional responses on the playground than in an experimental situation involving a lot of toys and one adult. She reports that the children issue more commands and threats in their give-and-take play among themselves than in conversation with an adult. She does not seem to take account of the fact that wide differences would probably result from differences in the degree of familiarity with a given adult ; that is, that a parent or nurse (or other very familiar adult) might be treated to a much larger number of emotional responses from the child than she herself received.

" All these studies suggest that personality differences may be as strikingly revealed in the child's language as in any other type of behaviour, entirely apart from the obvious differences related to intelligence-quotient and age.

" In more recent works, Piaget applies his functional analysis to more and more problems, discussing the development of children's concepts and of the more complex forms of thought reflected in their language. Though some of his work cannot legitimately be considered social psychology, the fact that the analysis proceeds from and always returns to linguistic material has made it possible to show in fascinating detail the way in which social attitudes and currently accepted notions and standards are imposed upon the growing child. Especially striking is Piaget's description of the *animism* of small children —their tendency to think of all things as alive and to make no distinction between the personal and the impersonal.

" The clarity of distinction between person and thing which exists for adults is seldom realized by children. If a child recog-

nized the difference between his point of view and the adult's, he might express it by saying, 'For grown-ups, only humans are persons, *everybody else are things*.' Not only everything that walks and 'talks' in a way—*e.g.* an animal—is 'who' to the child, but, to a considerable extent, everything that moves, and indeed, for many children, things that don't move.

" According to Piaget, the unquestioning animistic stage is followed by a stage in which only those things are believed to be alive which move of their own accord. The adult distinction between living and non-living things is apparently not completely achieved until shortly before the beginning of puberty. It would appear that the age levels for these stages are somewhat too high for American children, and Piaget's question-and-answer procedure has sufficient intrinsic unreliability to make even his data for the Geneva subjects somewhat uncertain. In the large, however, the attempt to see the world as the growing child sees it, to understand his notion of cause and effect, his notion of life and of personality, year by year, is of outstanding importance for the social psychologist as well as for all other psychologists.

" To what extent the stages discovered by Piaget are biologically inevitable, and to what extent they are a reflection of our civilization remains, of course, uncertain, though it is interesting to note that in Margaret Mead's recent study *Growing Up in New Guinea*, animism is conspicuously wanting in small children, and is only achieved much later at a period when animistic ideas are inculcated in the young by their elders. It is because of such data as these that we feel that the laws of social growth upon which we are so apt to rely must for the present be regarded as applicable only to our own society." [1]

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[1] Quoted from Murphy, G. and L. B., *Experimental Social Psychology*, pp. 277–81.

TECHNIQUES OF INTERVIEWING

MOST conversations happen casually. The time and place of a certain number are arranged in advance, but, even then, the exchanges of ideas are apt to be undefined, and the result disappointing. The outcome of this, of course, is the formal interview with a more or less prearranged technique.

The interview has been defined as " conversation directed to a definite purpose other than satisfaction in the conversation itself." Most interviewees, at least, take such meetings seriously. Few important appointments are ever made without a face-to-face examination, made by a committee, or by some one believed to have special insight and judgment. Most members of selection committees, however, will remember occasions when some of their questions were unnecessary, relating to facts ascertainable in the candidate's absence ; misdirected, eliciting no personal information, and trivial, since they did not help anybody to know the interviewee better. Mr. X's reputation of being a " judge of men " is difficult to verify without records of the subsequent performance of those whom he has approved or rejected.

The formal interview has many uses to-day. Three

which offer interesting contrasts are the social worker's, the vocational adviser's, and the ethnologist's. I am able to use here the recently-recorded experience of Miss Sibyl Clement Brown, Mr. Alec Rodger, and Dr. S. F. Nadel. Their contributions appear in full in *The Study of Society: Problems and Methods*.[1] A general account of their aims illustrates the possibilities of different interview-techniques.

Naturally, the place and general setting of the interview are important factors in determining its success. It is impossible here to discuss the complications of this problem as it concerns the ethnologist. The vocational adviser conducts his interview near any apparatus or test-material useful in helping him to make his decisions. The *venue* for the social worker's interview is sometimes not easy to decide. If it is held at the interviewee's home, she may be an unwilling hostess, or the social worker may feel that the position of a guest implies certain irksome restrictions upon speech and action. Much, however, depends not only upon the topics to be discussed, and the time of day, but also upon the personal make-up of both parties to the conversation. If the interview be held in an office, a more professional atmosphere is achieved, with its advantages and drawbacks. Knowledge that she has a special appointment sometimes colours the mood of the visitor, who will usually come to the interview with an attitude very different from that of one who has waited in a queue. To have a monopoly

[1] Edited by F. C. Bartlett, M. Ginsberg, E. J. Lindgren and R. H. Thouless. 1939. London. (Kegan Paul.)

of the interviewer's interest may gratify childish wishes, leading some interviewees to try to persuade the social worker that there is something uniquely important in their problems. The problem of the social worker in conducting an interview is to steer successfully between the extremes of professional detachment and human sympathy. She may have to decide whether to give or to withhold certain services, according to her view of the client's real needs. She cannot, therefore, feel detached in the different ways which may characterize the psychotherapist[1] or the vocational psychologist. Like them she is interested in the client's personal attitudes ; she cannot, however, use all their techniques, especially those which would involve many subsequent lengthy interviews. She may, however, find it useful to allow him freedom in recounting his narrative, and to avoid direct questions, especially leading ones. While the client pours his confidences over her, she attends especially to the feelings he expresses, and traces connections between the ideas which he puts into words. In making her report, she refrains from using too many adjectives descriptive of personality, since their significance varies from person to person, preferring to record spontaneous behaviour as evidence for her opinions. There are, of course, interviewees for whom narrative is extremely difficult, and they prefer to be questioned.

The extremely loquacious or the extremely silent interviewee may, consciously or unconsciously, tend to lead the interviewer off the track. In fact, though there

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[1] *Cf.* Chapter IX.

is a great difference between the social worker's interview and that of the psychoanalyst, the latter's experience may help to interpret extreme talkativeness or taciturnity. Both may be mechanisms of resistance. Loquacity may be really an exhibitionistic display, a screen for deeper layers of unconscious phantasy, or a dramatization instead of recollection.[1]

As with other kinds of interview, note-taking is important, and there are variations of policy. Most social workers write down the more formal facts, without any undesirable effect upon the interviewee, who may interpret this conduct as a sign that he is being taken seriously. When an intimate communication is being vouchsafed the recorder can lay down the pencil emphatically, and this gesture may itself invite trustfulness.

Significant symbols, meaning nothing to the interviewee, can be jotted down while he is speaking. These can be subsequently interpreted. Some interviewers use less obvious reminders, *e.g.* changing their position at significant points in the conversation. Until recently the social worker's interest was chiefly in the interviewee's physical, geographical, financial, and social circumstances, but increased attention has lately been paid to the latter's attitude towards his circumstances. This shift of accent makes the approach subtler. The interviewer is less content to accept, at its face value, the interviewee's account of events, experiences, and attitudes. To say this is not to imply that the interviewer merely verifies the interviewee's statement by reference

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[1] *Cf.* Chapter IX.

to a number of witnesses. She regards her data as open to interpretation in the light of discoveries concerning partly conscious wishes which produce falsification of facts. For example, a mother may constantly refer to one of her children as a " devil incarnate," and to another as a " little angel." The interviewer should discover whether the father, the school teachers, and the church ministers support these extreme views. Even if they do not, the mother's attitude remains important.

The interviewer's interpretation of her function is only one side of the matter : the client's views are significant. Like a psychotherapist's patient, the social worker's interviewee may be anxious to have a social difficulty solved, but whereas the patient may appreciate from the beginning that the problem—or at any rate a problem—resides within himself, the interviewee may think (wrongly) that the source of difficulty exists entirely outside himself. The very fact of asking for help implies that the seeker has partly lost his feeling of independence and self-sufficiency. This may result in curious attitudes towards the interviewer ; alternations, or even blends, of friendliness and withdrawal, of confidence and suspicion. The motives in seeking help may also be very different. If, for instance, a mother asks for a child to be placed away from home " because she is unmanageable," the mother may be influenced by the child's real needs, by neighbourhood opinion, by personal feelings of guilt, or by a wish to rid herself of responsibility. Accordingly, the social worker may represent to her the censorious neighbour, the kind parent, or the father-

confessor. The account which the mother gives of herself and her family will be correspondingly influenced.

Social workers have found that the interviewees may develop skill—in giving what they judge to be the expected answers. A group of sociologists in Chicago found that in certain districts where the residents made frequent use of social agencies, they had been classified in terms of their particular methods of investigation, and the prejudices of the questioners—and the residents appropriately responded to interviews.

In the interview-relation personal bias is a powerful factor. Any one who has practised psychotherapy or advised one member of a quarrelling pair will know how difficult it is not to take sides. This puts the matter simply, but complicated mental processes may be playing a part. When studying a family, for example, young social workers tend to identify themselves with the children rather than with the parents, and to gather a preponderant number of facts which point to parental mishandling. The social worker's personal bias can be reduced by professional training, which allows her to discover her more prominent prejudices, and by staff-meetings at which her own case-studies are discussed. Her technique gains from a study of psychotherapy : she realizes that both the manner and the order in which the interviewee describes his experiences are significant, and any stereotyped approach may obscure them.

The interviewer's temperament and personality may affect the results in ways which are not yet fully appreciated. In *The Study of Society*, Dr. O. A. Oeser gives an

interesting example. Seven hundred and fifty children, leaving school, having reached the age of fourteen, were interviewed by two officials. Their aim was to assess broadly the children's fitness for certain vocations. In this they were helped by a questionnaire, answered partly by the children and partly by their teacher. The officials then recorded their opinions about the child's fitness and preferences for a job, and their recommendations for a vocation.

Now, so far as the officials knew, they were merely doing, as completely as they could, a routine duty in which their efficiency could not fluctuate much. They both agreed that it was more pleasant to work in some schools than in others, because some were noisy, and in some the interviewing was done in a large hall ; while in others, each child was seen separately. They never suspected, however, that their forms were filled up worse in one place than in another. Yet the following table, where the officials' records were ranked for adequacy of treatment by competent psychologists as "very good" to "very poor" on a nine-point scale, is interesting.

Percentage of completed records ranked as "above average" :

Schools	I	II	III	IV
Girls	18.9	19.6	44.9	65.4
Boys	2.2	31.7	9.0	12.5

The effectiveness of the official dealing with the girls increased steadily as she went from school I, where all

the children, with several teachers and parents, were assembled in the great hall, to school IV, where each child was interviewed separately. The candidates in schools II and III lay between these extremes. In contrast, the officials dealing with the boys were less affected by the moderately populous and noisy environment. It is, therefore, clear that in all such judgments the interviewer's type must be taken into account.

The social worker's interview contrasts strikingly with that of the ethnologist. Usually, he employs it exclusively to obtain information about the " objective facts " of culture and society ; in other words, the interviewee is assigned the rôle of an informant ; facts about his own mental processes are not usually required, unless they cast light upon the ethnologist's main subjects of interest.

In many other types of interview the interviewee comes spontaneously ; indeed he often seeks to meet the questioner. The ethnologist's interview, in contrast, is characterized by almost complete absence of such motives in the interviewee.

The ethnologist should know something about the specific social standards of evaluation and interpretation valid in the interviewee's social group. Gross exaggeration of all statements bearing upon the individual's economic position or social success is the rule in one society, while another demands under-statement of any communications about one's family and progeny, *e.g.* the number of wives and children. To the ordinary scientific investigator such inaccurate and biased com-

munications might appear as mere distortions of fact, yet they can be interpreted, just as under-statements in English occasionally require to be " multiplied up " a little (" Not quite fair," " rather bored," " quaint," and " I was a little surprised at . . ." may express serious condemnation).

The informant's interest must be stimulated by indirect incentives ; a promise of money (clumsy, possibly dangerous, but often indispensable), or a description to the informant of other societies and a comparison of them with his own, may stir him to co-operate.

When the theme of the interview is secret and forbidden, the informant's emotions are occasionally aroused by the interviewer to the extent of almost violent disputes and controversies. He expresses doubt and disbelief, or may interview simultaneously several informants in different social positions. Some of these are likely to give inaccurate information, at which others may speak openly if only to confound their opponents and critics. Such a bullying technique requires for its success considerable knowledge of the group, and a special type of interviewer.

A very successful development of the interview technique has been its use for vocational guidance. Such an interview is unhampered by many factors which in other cases make interviewing difficult. The psychotherapist's patient is mentally disturbed ; the social worker's client worried ; the ethnologist's informant speaks a language only partly known to the interviewer. But in the vocational guidance interview the boy or girl

leaving school meets a strange but professionally friendly person, used to different forms of adolescent shyness, gaucherie, and bumptiousness, possessing the kind of information which the client requires, and seldom likely to take more than the minimum degree of interest in the interviewee's weak points, being anxious to bring out the strong ones. Mr. Alec Rodger in *The Study of Society* suggests "twenty points for the consideration of vocational guidance advisers." Explaining the technique, with the minimum of added comments, they are:

(1) Collect relevant data.

(2) Impart relevant knowledge. (Many notions which people—particularly young people—hold about the requirements and opportunities of occupations are inadequate or incorrect.)

(3) Persuade the subject to accept what appears to be a desirable course of action.

(4) Use a technique which is flexible, not rigid. (The ideal of some interviewers—to standardize the "external circumstances" of the interview, and thus to make observations scientifically comparable—is unattainable, since the inner determinants of a subject's behaviour at the time of the interview must be given due consideration.)

(5) Your manner and questions should appear informal, but not "hearty."

(6) Begin with pleasurable topics. Unpleasant matters may be discussed later, but do not finish an interview on such a topic.

(7) Phrase your question judiciously and put it

frankly. Avoid " trick " questions, designed to expose inconsistencies in the subject's statement. Do not use leading questions (*e.g.* " You wouldn't like office work, would you ? ") unless they can be justified.

When asking questions about matters like family relationships, in which reserve or evasion might be expected, be indiscreet, but discreetly. An answer to such a question as, " What do you think of your young brother ? " may often be best obtained by asking instead, " Are you and your young brother very much alike in some ways ? " Avoid queries which give offence by ignoring the subject's point of view, *e.g.* " Do you often get angry with your sisters ? " is less tactful than an inquiry relating to the sisters' behaviour.

(8) Get the interviewee to fill up a questionnaire beforehand ; then base some further questions upon it. They will not sound so tactless as they might do if quite unintroduced.

(9) Encourage the subject to do most of the talking, even if his contributions are not always relevant.

(10) Don't moralize or criticize unnecessarily, by word, look, or gesture. If criticism seems desirable, express your criticisms as if they came from some one else, *e.g.* " But might not some people argue that. . . ? "

(11) Use a carefully prepared record form.

(12) Take account of both present and past manifestations of the subject's talents and temperament.

(13) Begin by discussing occupations which the subject has himself suggested he should take up, and get his reasons for choosing them. Then observe his reactions

to suggestions of your own about " suitable " and " unsuitable " occupations.

(14) Observe not only the interviewee's words and phrases, but his general manner, and the way in which he deals with special topics.

(15) Take notes discreetly. Put down your pen during revelations, but after a few minutes switch back the conversation to some topic, *e.g.* proficiency in mathematics, which has already been discussed. You can then make brief notes on the revelations, while the subject thinks you are recording his comments upon mathematics.

(16) Use a five-point rating scale to record the subject's disposition and physical characteristics.

(17) Don't rush to fit subjects into " occupational " or other types, for this may lead you to disregard important individual differences. People of very different characteristics are to be found in most occupations.

(18) Bearing the reservations of (17) in mind, it may help you to group people into types of occupation : intellectual, dealing primarily with words or figures ; practical, dealing primarily with things ; and social, in which success depends to a considerable extent upon facility in handling people.

(19) In offering the interviewee your conclusions, be reasonably authoritative. If you are fitted for and fairly experienced in vocational guidance, your suggestions, though imperfect, are likely to be at least as good as any one else's.

(20) Your general recommendation may be wise,

your specific recommendation unwise. Do not cramp the style of the employment officer, who probably knows more than you do about the state of the labour market, and whose work is just as important as your own.

CONVERSATION IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

IN most conversations, the other person's mental integrity and emotional balance are taken for granted. In the psychotherapeutic interview, discovery of the patient's mental conflicts and observation of his display of emotion are all in the day's work ; in fact, they are the day's work. No single formula or even a related series of them can express the unique characteristics of a psychotherapist's conversation. To talk about almost anything with some sympathizers makes us feel better ; and this suggests that much artless mental healing is practised every day. The present chapter, however, will describe only the kind of psychotherapy which is artful, in the early and respectful sense of that word.

In writing the following pages, I have been greatly helped by W. v. D. Bingham and B. V. Moore's *How to Interview* and F. Jensen's chapter on psychoanalysis in his and Gardner Murphy's *Approaches to Personality*.

It is useful to indicate some types of conversation with which the psychotherapeutic interview is to be contrasted. There is the private, informal, but intimate conversation, with a definite guiding motive. In it, each

member may be frank, and neither need " hold himself in " emotionally. There is the systematic examination or " oral questionnaire," designed to get a clear idea of the interviewee's traits of personality, his mental sources of strength and weakness. There are, too, special interviews conducted by the social worker, the ethnologist, and the vocational adviser described in Chapter VIII. Then there is the mental test, perhaps called an interview only by courtesy. It may become so highly standardized that it is often a formal mental prancing of the tester before the testee. When, however, the encounter is leavened by clinical insight and sympathy, it can be regarded as a genuine contribution to psychology.

The psychotherapeutic interview is a friendly contest between minds ; as much a contest as a " singles " at tennis. It is therefore desirable that one member of the pair shall be more intelligent, more sympathetic—in a very special sense of this term—and more learned in psychology than the average person ; a consideration occasionally respected insufficiently even inside expert circles. The aim of this interview is to discover certain emotional complications in the patient, to readjust or abolish them, and, if necessary, to alter his personality.

The symptoms and circumstances which cause a patient to seek help are, to quote Bingham and Moore :

" . . . varied as the troubles in Pandora's box. He may stutter badly. He may merely be backward in his studies, or in some other study. He may be over-anxious without cause, or suffer from a delusion of persecution. He may be unduly exhilarated, or profoundly depressed ; hysterical, or obsessive. Sometimes

the symptoms are bodily aches and pains not related to any discoverable organic disorder. Perhaps his behaviour has suggested a serious aberration of intellect—gross lapses of memory, hallucinations, fixed ideas, or distorted financial judgments. Often there has been a specific anti-social act : a theft, a fight, a sexual aggression, a disastrous automobile accident, a forgery ; or it may be a troublesome habit, or an accumulation of many minor difficulties resulting in failure to get on well with boss, subordinates, customers, schoolmates, or family.

" But whatever the occasion or the obvious difficulty, the clinical psychologist looks at the symptoms against a broad background. He wants to know not only the nature and history of the particular complaint, but also something about the patient's career, his ancestry, his home, his general health and physical condition, his mental endowments, his schooling, his work situation, his social and recreational activities, his interests, ambitions, failures, and accomplishments, his total personality. To get this background, not the patient only, but his family, his employer, his priest, his physician, his associates, may have to be consulted."

In such work, three types of " interview " are customary. Only one is a genuine conversation, yet, since the others prepare for the interview, they will be mentioned here.

The first consists of offering the patient a list of questions known by the rather ambitious title of the " personality inventory." This can be simply handled. It is a list of questions about different normal and abnormal fears and desires. The answerer is asked simply to tick (check) the answer " Yes," " No," or " ? " which appears opposite each question.

That, at least, is the idea. Such a list, duly checked,

may help the interviewer greatly, provided that the answers really indicate important mental abnormalities in the answerer. Often they must do so, yet some investigators appear to assume that every one, even the neurotic person, will or can (even in the mental setting of an examination-room) call up and dwell upon any one of his phobias long enough to give an affirmative answer to questions, instead of wincing at mention of them and omitting to answer. Any one neurotic enough to have a distressing phobia may be neurotic enough to succumb to the temptation to disobey a printed sentence, especially as, subconsciously or even consciously, he may resent such an intimate question asked so abruptly, for he is unlikely to have read the list at a glance.

Inevitably, any one who uses the answers from such inventories must assume (for there is no other evidence) that one " Yes " is as significant as another. Yet the face-to-face psychotherapeutic interviewer regards it as part of his task to assess the relative importance of these " neurotic " symptoms (and some of them may not be neurotic) in the patient.

Perhaps the assumption that the reasonably healthy person will answer all the questions truthfully is justified ; who knows ? Possibly those who administer personality inventories have informed themselves extensively about the temptations to " leg-pulling " which such questionnaires may offer to different types of answerer. It should not be forgotten, however, that playing the fool with a character-questionnaire may not be always suggested by *joie de vivre*, especially if these examination answers are to

be used seriously. In *An American Testament* Joseph Freeman tells how during the last war some American students revenged themselves for certain asperities of discipline by seeing to it that the officers got the lowest character-ratings.

The subject's responses, too, are limited by the inventory ; details obtained by free association, if written down, would take up much time and space. Even then, who can treat free associations statistically ? By examining a series of ticks or of underlined words, one cannot get details of specific causes of the fears, but only of general causes, with names stereotyped by the questionnaire's wording.

It is claimed, however, that answers from the personality-inventory can be evaluated on a basis more objective than that of the interviewer's personal judgment, though the different " Yes " responses cannot be " weighted " with their relative seriousness. One is tempted to suggest that in the last sentence, " because " might replace " though." Objectivity may occasionally be a will-o'-the-wisp when trying to make a personality-judgment, though to elaborate this idea here is impossible. " Weighting," too, may depend upon time and circumstances. A phobia of closed spaces, for example, which in ordinary conditions seldom troubled the patient, might become frequent and incapacitating if he were threatened by air-raids.

These severe things having been said about personality-inventories, it is only right to repeat that, properly handled, they can be very valuable, since they offer points

from which, in a later face-to-face interview, the clinician or vocational adviser can begin his questioning.

Let us now consider the intimate psychotherapeutic conversation. At one time, outside the circles of the psychotherapists and psychologists, it was commonly but erroneously supposed that their procedure consisted merely in gaining the patient's confidence, discovering what was wrong, and then talking to him " sensibly." This simple view may still be held in some quarters, but, by now, many people appreciate how the behaviour-patterns termed suggestion, persuasion, or analysis usually dominate the psychotherapeutic interview, though distinguishing these procedures is a technical matter. " Paradoxically," Bingham and Moore remark :

> ". . . the prolonged ' mental-clinic ' interview, though most definite in purpose, is also most unstandardized . . . the fact that a particular . . . group of symptoms is a definite indication of a certain disorder may have been very carefully worked out, and scientifically verified, while the actual process of drawing from the patient the data necessary to construct this clinical picture remains unsystematic, or at least unspecified. In other instances, the interview is planned in detail, data-sheets or questionnaires are scrupulously filled out, and various technical procedures are employed in drawing hidden difficulties to the surface."

Naturally, the first attempt to reach the patient's worries is to ask straight questions and expect straight answers. It is not surprising that this method occasionally fails, since, words being what they are, indubitably straight questions may wing their way straight past the target. " Do you

hate X ? " " Are you *jealous* of Y ? " " Do you *sincerely* want your mission to succeed ? " " Are you *loyal* to this institution in word, *thought*, and deed ? " ; such questions may receive straight answers, but only on the conscious level. Paper labels and glass tubes attached to the walls of a building will give a straight answer about the direction and degree of its subsidence, but may not indicate the presence of a geological fault. Often, too, for purposes of diagnosis, the way in which the answer is given is more important than is the actual choice of words.

" Free " association has been discussed so often that, exciting as it is, I must leave it to other writers. Very different ideas of it, for example, would be obtained from James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Susan Glaspell's *Suppressed Desires*. Yet it is not difficult to grasp the essentials of " free " association—the adjective is a sturdy question-beggar !

Dr. Friedrich Jensen writes :

". . . when the patient tells without restraint whatever he is thinking, be it reminiscent or imaginative, relevant or irrelevant, proper or improper, rational or fanciful. There may even be clues to unsuspected trends of feeling in bizarre and fragmentary ideas which flit into mind if the reins of rationality are purposely cast aside and reverie holds sway unhampered ; for fancies do not spring into being uncaused ; and while they are usually the product of easily identifiable experiences, common, or recent, or vivid, they may come in part from less readily recognized impulsions or remote memories. So various techniques of free association and of irrational thinking or fantasy are sometimes employed to collect and bring into the focus of attention materials the relevance of which becomes obvious enough when they are later subjected to the scrutiny of rational evaluation."

The aim of free association is to evade the censorship of consciousness, and this necessity cannot be understood unless Freud's concepts of repression and resistance are grasped. He asserts that everything in the mind that might lead to a psychic disturbance was *once* conscious. When it became no longer consciously bearable, it was driven into the unconscious. Free association may bring it back by defeating the forces of resistance which prevent the subject from becoming directly aware of these repressed memories. The psychoanalyst's task is to beat down this resistance ; but without its action he would have no guide to direct his attention to the exact nature of the themes which, with their emotional colouring, have been repressed. In this respect, therefore, the psychoanalytic interview differs from all others. Indeed, in its later stages it may not be correct to call it an interview, since the doctor attempts to achieve aloofness. Yet, since, presumably, the patient would not go on talking long if he were certain that the doctor had been stricken with deafness, the relationship may still be called a conversation, of a curious, perhaps unique, kind. Dr. Jensen writes further :

> " If we picture the situation in which the patient finds himself when he goes to the doctor to be analyzed, these conceptions will be clearer. According to psychoanalytical routine, the patient lies down on a divan in a comfortable position. The doctor, invisible to the patient, sits behind. The patient determines the theme of the daily work and starts to talk. He commences with whatever occurs to him first, and goes freely from one idea to another, one association to another. The consultation is something between a monologue and

dialogue. The patient is in a restful relaxed position, which excludes as far as possible distracting impressions or sensations, so that he can direct his whole attention to the pictures unrolling before his eyes. The only thing demanded of him is that he say unqualifiedly everything that goes through his head, even though he may think it is nonsensical, unimportant or improper. Above all, he must not judge morally what occurs to him or what he wants to say, but must talk as if he were quite alone, and as if nothing he said could compromise him.

" The doctor conducts himself quite passively, listening to what is being said. He notices that the patient's flow of words is sometimes fluent, sometimes halting. In the story there· are sometimes little gaps, occasionally big ones, which are at first not filled out. At other points the patient mimics or gesticulates, he yawns or laughs, or moves his hands or feet. The emotions play over him as hands do over a piano. Sometimes he stops suddenly, then again he may speak excitedly, moan, sigh, spring up, say he cannot go on talking because he is too excited. A series of affects or emotions have disturbed or stopped the current of the story.

" To observe the emotions is just as important as to listen to the story. A resistance to the reappearance of certain memories can sometimes be perceived more clearly from the form than from the content of the story. The patient *cannot* tell all ; he seizes upon substitute expressions that are, however, always connected with the truth that he cannot as yet recognize. Why does he not know the truth at once ? Social, ethical, æsthetic reasons, impressed upon him from childhood on, force him to conform, or at least to appear to conform, to what the general pattern of society demands. In every one of us the process of repression, from childhood on, of certain ' improper ' thoughts, wishes or experiences goes on inexorably guided by parental discipline, education, custom, and convention. In many ways we disguise our motives from ourselves ; if an impulse is unlovely, we ' project ' it to another person, and accuse him of

desiring what we ourselves desire. Or we ' rationalize ' or find good reasons for our own conduct." [1]

A concomitant, perhaps a result, of such a relationship is the establishment between analyst and patient of a condition known as transference. In its positive form it is demonstrated by the patient " regarding " the analyst emotionally in a way resembling that in which a child regards a parent. Transference may be positive when the relationships are of friendship and emotional dependence ; negative, when the patient dislikes the analyst, is disobedient, and does " queer " things to frustrate and annoy him.

In any prolonged intimate conversation between ordinary persons such a relationship might arise in a simple form, but not in such a pronounced manner as during the analytic procedure. However, the task of analysis is regarded as incomplete until the transference itself has been analysed and dissolved.

What actually takes place in the " prolonged interview " (the name H. D. Lasswell gives to the analytical treatment) ? Though, as he remarks, it has a history of thirty years, there have been few efforts to " objectify " its features ; " the empirical material which is so far reported does not rest upon the verbatim recording of what happens, except in a few specimen instances of highly pathological cases." Attempts are being made to record some physiological changes which take place in the subject of the interview.

H. D. Lasswell, in *Psychopathology and Politics*, calls attention to the doubts of competent specialists about what goes on in the analytical interview. The analyst seldom takes notes during the session. If and when he makes them afterwards, they are unlikely to evoke in any mind except his own (and even that may be doubtful) adequate representative recollections of the patient's total behaviour, including speech and gesture. Indeed, this fact has been urged to meet the criticism that the notes of a psychoanalysis do not give the actual conversation. It is pointed out that the words used by the patient were not the only important factors, for his total appearance as well as his speech, not only what he said but how he said it, are highly significant. Indeed, recently some psychotherapists have stated frankly that since they are artists — or artisans — they cannot contribute to the scientific knowledge of mind, and do not intend to try.

The use of this technique of apparently uncontrolled phantasy coaxes or goads the patient to re-activate his struggle with his anti-social impulses. During free association, however, instead of acting them out, he talks about them. American writers often describe this as verbalizing the actions. Though I am not happy about this choice of word, I am not philosopher enough to express my dissatisfaction satisfactorily. I will try, however, to do so by an example. When water solidifies or evaporates it turns into ice or steam, and nothing of it may remain as water. When the king is symbolized by a crown, he may or may not be underneath it and he retains his personal identity. Now, " verbalize " seems com-

parable with "symbolize" but not with "solidify." The belief, too, that verbalizing a pattern of behaviour in some sense "acts" it, seems unjustified. The patient finds, chooses, and emits words which to him may symbolize some of these actions. In doing this he may discharge energy along non-linguistic channels, especially while expressing emotion, and this behaviour is closely watched by the psychotherapist. But the meaning of such behaviour for the patient may not be identical with that which the observer attributes to it. For example, I think I have reasons for believing that a tremor of the upper lip, easily observed in two of my friends at certain times, means very different emotions in them. But this is merely surmise, like many of the psychotherapists' conclusions.

Lasswell says (p. 211), "The necessity for verbalization brings the acts of fantasy into clearer forms than usual, which is a necessary preliminary to moments of sustained logical reflection." This may be true, but possibly, too, this necessity offers opportunities for considerable distortion by omission, since—if, at least, the patient is a visualizer—some parts of his fantasy can be verbalized more easily than others, and some not at all.

In another publication [1] I described and sketched— only because no other visualizing psychologist seemed to have done so—a train of visual images which arose in answer to my problem, "Do I want to go to the Tyrol for my next holiday?" The mental pictures were of

[1] *The Place of Imagery in Mental Processes.* Manchester University Press, 1937.

mountains, buildings, streets, villages, and (to my great surprise) not of any human beings. For this fortunate reason, it was easy to publish full details and names of these images. But the embarrassments which send patients to psychoanalysts are not concerned with the conflicting attractions of the Jungfrau and the Patscherkofel. If my problem had been, "Do I want to resume or terminate friendship with X, with whom I quarrelled yesterday as an accumulated result of many minor annoyances?" it would be less easy to publish my imagery, for more than one reason. There is, of course, the simple one that people's names are best kept private, especially if the record is to be published, but also reasons less obvious, *e.g.* personal relationships are not so easily or so accurately "verbalized" as are spatial, temporal, or causal ones. Even psychologists have sometimes said "words fail me" when they considered themselves unfairly treated. If the "analysand" be young, especially perhaps if he or she uses fashionable slang, the analyst may find it difficult to interpret not only the meaning of a word used, but the degree of importance to be attached to it. I remember instances of people being led astray by hearing the words "disgusting" and "filthy" used for actions which seemed merely to have puzzled or annoyed the person who chose these epithets. This gap in our knowledge concerning the relation between meaning and its vehicles of expression is insufficiently respected by psychologists.

The analyst's apparent solicitude tends to reinstate in the patient emotions connected with the early family situation, when as a little child he could play irre-

sponsibly under an adult's watchful care. At that time reproof and reprimand were rare ; even, perhaps, unknown. The patient may, therefore, cherish a misguided hope that the outcome of the therapy will be the boundless and unlimited gratification of his demands. He will be disappointed, but he may not know this yet. There are perhaps situations analogous to this in ordinary conversations ; there are certainly people in whose company one is less inhibited ; persons who one feels can be trusted not only to be discreet, but to judge and criticize to a minimal extent, and with whom, therefore, one is more " childish."

Tendencies less superficial than these, however, may move the patient in psychoanalysis. He may have an unconscious wish for punishment, and therefore may feel compelled to confess to anti-social tendencies which his socialized self has constantly rejected.

In short, as Lasswell says, " Reminiscence regilds the faded tapestries of the past, and restores to the full glare of consciousness the cobwebs of the mind which house the spiders of malevolence and lechery." He asks (p. 218) how it is that at the end of the nineteenth century there appeared in Western civilization this remarkably intricate procedure, requiring months, or even years, of constant introspection. He believes this to be a sign of the value-crisis in our civilization. It is significant that the totalitarian states lost no time in exiling psychologists who were concerned with values, and not psychoanalysts alone, for in such states values are decided for the people.

It will be known to many readers that the patient un-

consciously exaggerates both the respectfulness and the affection which the analyst feels for him. The analyst, indeed, usually refrains, as far as possible, from having any social relations with the patient other than those of the interview. And the analyst's ideal is said to be to dissolve the transference and to leave the patient standing on his own feet. Such an ideal is easier to achieve with some patients than with others, and in some social environments more easily than in others. Indeed, just here some friendly critics of psychoanalysis find themselves puzzled. One psychoanalysed person may say, " The best of having been analysed is that after it you don't care a damn for anybody." But do we seriously wish, for example, to produce a number of doctors or teachers who don't care a damn for our nearest and dearest ? A man who had derived great benefit from psychoanalytic treatment mentioned this effect as one of its drawbacks. He now thought most people's ambitions and ideals rather trivial, and in these, reasonably enough, he included his own. Be that as it may, studying the psychoanalytic setting of the conversation enables us to appreciate the many complications of personal relationships which may cause even an ordinary interview to have results very different from those desired by the conversers.

One of these results is transference, which influences the emotional relationship of the patient and the physician. It is believed to be caused by the patient transferring to him the emotional attitudes of infantile dependence and affection which he formerly felt for his parents, nurses, or other people who influenced him powerfully in early

days. Transference is found not only in the physician-patient relationship but in many situations of ordinary life.

When two people meet for the first time they bring with them all their emotional prejudices, and each responds to the other in accordance with his early experiences and more recent emotional attachments. If a person met for the first time resembles one of these people who were influential in early life, even if the likeness is not great, transference may occur. When the emotions now aroused relate to a memory which has been forgotten and repressed, the present relationship of the two who meet for the first time as strangers is complex.

Another potent cause of complicated relationships in the interview is " projection." Dr. Bernard Hart, in the *Psychology of Insanity*, defines it as a peculiar reaction of the mind to the presence of a repressed complex, in which the complex or its effect is regarded by the person as belonging no longer to himself but some other real or imaginary individual. People who possess some fault or deficiency which they are ashamed of are notoriously intolerant of that same fault or deficiency in others. The parvenu who is secretly conscious of his own social deficiencies talks much of the " bounders " and " out-siders " whom he observes around him, while the one thing which the muddle-headed man does not tolerate is the lack of clear thinking in other people.

Perhaps even more disconcerting in ordinary inter-views is " introjection." This is observed when a sensi-tive individual persists in finding a personal self-reference,

with a compliment or implied criticism, in anything to which the interviewer may refer. It seems safe to believe that a sign of sophistication is the ability to converse without seeing personal references in everything.

It may be exaggeration to say that in most ordinary conversations all the personal relationships which arise so spectacularly in the psychotherapeutic interview are present, but probably, at least in germ, they are. Perhaps, therefore, everything known about the psychotherapeutic interview will cast light upon the ordinary exchange of words between human beings.

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